



Social Media Marketing and Its Influence on Brand Equity: The Mediating Role of Word of Mouth and E-Word of Mouth

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the nexus between social media marketing and brand equity, and the role of word of mouth and electronic in mediating this connectivity word of mouth. A quantitative approach with a descriptive explanatory design is employed to estimate the link between the variables observed. The study adopts purposive sampling technique with a sample size of 200 participants, and data is analyzed using Path Analysis with Warp-PLS 3.0. The findings indicate that social media marketing positively influences brand equity, and both word of mouth and e-word of mouth play a vital role in escalating brand equity. The study also confirms the mediating role of word of mouth and e-word of mouth in explaining the connectivity between social media marketing and brand equity. The results suggest that the assimilation and educational-based tourism management can promote tourism through social media to enhance the value of tourist attractions' names, encouraging the public to enlarge in word-of-mouth promotion.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami pengaruh pemasaran media sosial terhadap ekuitas merek, yang dimediasi oleh word of mouth dan electronic word of mouth. Metode kuantitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif eksplanatori digunakan untuk memprediksi hubungan antara variabel-variabel. Sampel penelitian dipilih secara purposive dengan jumlah responden sebanyak 200 orang, dan data dianalisis menggunakan Path Analysis dengan Warp-PLS 3.0. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemasaran media sosial memberikan dampak yang signifikan terhadap ekuitas merek, dan word of mouth serta e-word of mouth memiliki peran penting dalam meningkatkan ekuitas merek. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menegaskan peran mediasi dari word of mouth dan e-word of mouth dalam menjelaskan hubungan antara pemasaran media sosial dan ekuitas merek. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa pengelolaan pariwisata berbasis asimilasi dan edukasi dapat dipromosikan melalui media sosial untuk meningkatkan nilai dari nama-nama tempat wisata, sehingga masyarakat dapat berpartisipasi dalam promosi melalui word-of-mouth.

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INTRODUCTION

The term of brand equity is interesting in the global and local context as it has become increasingly important for businesses to build and maintain strong brands in today's competitive and globalized marketplace (Seo & Park, 2020; Lee & Park, 2022). With the rise of e-commerce and social media, businesses now have access to a global audience, which means that they must develop brand equity strategies that resonate with consumers across different cultures and regions (Guha et al., 2021). Nevertheless, businesses must also concern on building brand equity in their local markets (Pencarelli, 2020). Local consumers often have different needs and preferences, and businesses must tailor their brand messages and marketing strategies to effectively reach and engage them (Salnikova & Grunert, 2020). Moreover, brands often have an advantage over global brands in terms of trust and familiarity, which build brand equity (Winarso, 2020).

The development of the technological era has played an essential and innovative role in human life. We Are Social and Hootsuite (2019) conducted research in early 2017 and estimated that internet users in Indonesia grew 51% within one year. The escalate of the Internet users in Indonesia is the largest in the world and even exceeds the average growth of 10% globally. Currently, there are many types of technology, and one of them is social media. Social media is an application that can be accessed using a smartphone or laptop that is connected to the internet. It was reported that the population of Indonesia is receptive to technology. Furthermore, the majority of internet users in Indonesia consist of individuals belonging to Generation Z (27.94%) and Millennials (25.87%). The two generations are said to be friendly or understand the current technological developments (Winarso, 2020).

The function of social media is now varied and has its advantages to the social media provided by the organization. The adoption of social media is generally purposed to communicate from one person to another, and over time social media develops by being able to provide content (Naeem, 2021). Data from the 2019 ASEAN Youth Survey, as many as 97% of Indonesian youth who were used as respondents stated that they acquired information online through social media. Respondents in the study viewed themselves as responsible for their media use. In fact, there are approximately 71% of young people said they can distinguish between hard news and opinions from the internet. Based on the mentioned data, it can be inferred that social media and internet usage are prevalent among individuals aged 18 to 35, who are receptive to the involvement of technology and social media (Dewi & Satyawan, 2022).

The fast-paced growth of technology in the digital realm, coupled with the emergence of the internet, has significantly impacted the field of marketing. In recent times, there has been a shift from traditional marketing practices to digital marketing, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic that has affected Indonesia since early 2020, forcing all marketing activities to go digital. In this regard, social media marketing has emerged as a highly effective strategy as it enables potential customers to access comprehensive product information and conduct transactions over the internet (Patma et al., 2021). A prior study by Infante and Mardikaningsih (2022) remarked that with gadgets, money, and an internet connection, consumers can easily buy or obtain the goods they want. These advantages are also beneficial for businesses with technological advances that make expanding or selling their products easier.

The increasingly utilization of social media can be used in promoting tourism sites which more flexible and profitable for business actors (Pencarelli, 2020). The reasoning behind the increasing preference for social media as a communication and promotional instruments for tourism lies in its perceived ease of use, extensive outreach, and cost-effectiveness. As a result, social media is becoming an increasingly popular medium for the communication and promotion of tourism. Bassano et al. (2019) remarked that the tourism industry is essential in developing the digital world because its important in marketing the tourism industry. In addition to promotion through social media, strong brand equity is needed to add value given to products and services. To create good brand equity, marketing communications are required through creating brand awareness, the right brand association in the minds of consumers, consumers' perceived quality towards brands, and the establishment of brand loyalty (Yoganathan et al., 2015).

To improve an object brand, it can strengthen the preparation of marketing channels, both directly and indirectly (Rauschnabel et al., 2019). In doing so, everything related to tourist destinations will reach the targeted tourist segment. This suggests that the sustainability of tourist destinations is positively impacted by a robust and distinctive brand. Furthermore, tourist destinations with a strong brand tend to be easily recalled and sought-after by the public (Yousaf et al., 2017). To optimize a business location, think about more than just the promotion (social media) and brand of a business. However, to further optimize the need for the spread of communication that can be done through the role of word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Bialkova & Te Paske, 2020). According to Tjiptono et al. (2014), WOM has a very extraordinary promote on behavior change, especially in the search for consumer information, evaluation and buying decisions.

WOM is the answer to the main issue in marketing communications, namely the fact that the message source with the lowest credibility is usually planned as part of a marketing communications program (Toder-Alon et al., 2014). However, in many certain cases, the message source is trusted from word-of-mouth communications, references, news coverage, gossip and others that have the highest credibility (Tjiptono et al., 2014). In addition to WOM and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in cyberspace, media is needed so that people can communicate with other people. Huete-Alcocer (2017) defined e-WOM as the diffusion of product-related information via the Internet to a large audience. Moreover, Lee and Park (2022) elaborated that e-WOM is an informal mode of communication among consumers that revolves around specific products, and is considered a significant factor in consumer decision-making due to its substantial influence on their behavior.

Despite the essential role of social media in promoting brand equity, there is a gap in extant empirical studies on this relationship. Specifically, there is a lack of research exploring the mediating role of WOM and e-WOM in the connectivity between social media marketing (SMM) and brand equity (BE). This study expands upon the works of Zahoor and Qureshi (2017); Patma et al. (2021); and Zarei et al. (2022), and presents a novel avenue for future scholars to explore. As highlighted by Patma et al. (2021), a comprehend of WOM and e-WOM as mediating variable is necessary. This research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through SMM affects BE, as well as how WOM and e-WOM can be employed to develop brand equity in SMM campaigns.

While some research has explored the connectivity between SMM and BE, very few have accessed the role of WOM and e-WOM in mediating this nexus. WOM and e-WOM are crucial components of SMM and can significantly impact BE. Understanding the mediating role of WOM and e-WOM can provide valuable insights into how SMM affects brand equity. Theoretically, this study enhances the SMM theory by presenting empirical evidence on how SMM fosters brand equity via WOM and e-WOM. The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the method and materials to address the research hypothesis. Section 3 exhibits the empirical findings and followed by conclusion in Section 4.

METHOD

Research Design

This study is quantitative research that aims to examine the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on brand equity (BE) and investigate the mediating role of word-of-mouth (WOM) and e-word of mouth (e-WOM) in L'SIMA Bike Park, a destination for assimilation and education sport tourism in Malang of East Java, Indonesia. The reason for taking study in this area is because L'SIMA Bike Park is the first assimilation and education-based tourism owned by the government to facilitate education for prisoners. To deal with the research objectives, PLS-SEM was employed using Warp-PLS because of its capability to process some independent and dependent variables as well as test mediating variables.

Data Collection

The data were obtained from the questionnaires in Google form, which were directed to the user of social media in Malang of East Java. In detail, the criteria of respondents were the user of

social media who have informed other people about L'SIMA Bike Park and those who know about this tourism site. In this study, purposive sampling was involved to determine a sample of 220 respondents, as it allows for the selection of participants with particular traits or characteristics that are pertinent to the research question or hypothesis. The data collection method utilized in this research was an online questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed using Google forms online at L'SIMA Bike Park business line objects to approximately 220 respondents and we found 200 valid responses from the participants for further analysis.

Operational Definition and Measurement

The Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree (1)” to “strongly agree (5)”, was used in this study. The instruments were developed based on previous relevant research and theories. SMM refers to the practice of providing brands and content on social media channels to enhance brand awareness, increase traffic. Four items from Patma et al. (2021) were adopted to estimate SMM. BE is a crucial factor for companies, as it can directly impact BE. In this study, four items from Mansur et al. (2021) were involved to calculate BE. WOM refers to communication in the form of recommendations, either individually or in groups, that provide personal information about a product or service. Four items from Ruswanti et al. (2020) were used to measure WOM. Lastly, e-WOM refers to a customer or former customer’s positive or negative statement related with certain product or company intended for many people. Five items from Sun et al. (2021) were employed to calculate e-WOM.

Data Analysis

In terms of the research framework, path analysis was employed as the data analysis technique in this research. The study utilized structural equation modeling with Warp PLS 3.0 version to analyze the data. In general, structural equation modeling can be explained as an analytical tool that can combine factor analysis approaches, structural models, and path analysis. This study followed the measurement model, structural estimation and hypothesis testing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic of Respondents

In general, respondents involved in this research were male visitors, with a percentage of 59%, and females, with a percentage of 41%. In addition, the respondents in this paper were people between the age of 21-30 years (85%), and 31 years old and more (12%). From the educational background, the participants have a bachelor’s degree with a percentage of slightly higher than 50%. Lastly, the respondents in this study are Instagram users, with a percentage of 41.5%. In detail, the demographic of participant is exhibited in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Man	118	59
Woman	82	41
Age (year)		
20 less	6	3
21 – 30	170	85
31 and more	24	12
Education background		
Senior high schools	75	37.5
Diploma	9	4.5
Bachelor	105	52.5
Post Graduate	11	5.5

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Social Media		
YouTube	59	29.5
Instagram	83	41.5
Facebook	31	15.5
Twitter	10	5
Tiktok	17	8.5

Measurement Model

The link between measurement items and construct was investigated undergoing the measurement model estimation. In doing so, we performed construct reliability and convergent validity, as well as discriminant validity for the constructs. The measurement of convergent validity is intended to calculate whether the indicators are valid or not in estimating the dimensions or variables being tested. Convergent validity for each indicator in calculating dimensions is remarked by the magnitude of the loading factor. An indicator can be stated to be valid when the loading factor is positive and higher than 0.6. Based on the Table 2, it can be concluded that all instruments in the variable produce a loading factor above 0.6, thus the instruments in this study are declared valid (see Table 2). In addition, the table also shows the composite reliability, which shown by composite reliability (CR) value that should more than 0.7. The statistical output shows that the CR value ranges from 0.711 to 0.832, implying to meet the thresholds

Table 2. Convergent validity and Composite Reliability

Variable	Indicator	C.R	Loading factor	Decision
SMM	Reflective quality	0.832	0.647	Valid
	Stimulated quality		0.638	Valid
	Practiced quality		0.607	Valid
	Advantaged quality		0.633	Valid
BE	Brand awareness	0.802	0.648	Valid
	Brand association		0.795	Valid
	Perceived quality		0.786	Valid
	Brand Loyalty		0.699	Valid
WOM	People who love the product	0.711	0.859	Valid
	Feel good when talking		0.812	Valid
	Feel connected to the conversation		0.669	Valid
e-WOM	Platform assistance	0.820	0.652	Valid
	Venting negative feelings		0.677	Valid
	Concern for other consumers		0.718	Valid
	Economic incentive		0.621	Valid
	Helping the company		0.682	Valid
	Advice seeking		0.620	Valid

To test the discriminant validity of the constructs, cross-loading calculations were performed. The criterion used was that if the loading factor of an indicator in a corresponding variable was higher than the correlation value of the indicator in other variables, the indicator was deemed valid in measuring the corresponding variable. The results, as shown in Table 3, exhibit that the constructs have a square root value of AVE that is higher than the value of any other variable,

indicating good discriminant validity. It remarks that all variables are determined to meet the requirements of discriminant validity or discrimination validity.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Variable	SMM	BE	WOM	e-WOM
SMM	0.843	0.661	0.655	0.577
BE	0.761	0.712	0.288	0.490
WOM	0.665	0.288	0.700	0.651
e-WOM	0.577	0.490	0.651	0.611

R-Squared (R²)

The adjusted R-Squares (R²) values were calculated to estimate the impact of certain exogenous latent variables on endogenous latent variables and their respective effects. The results of the adjusted R² calculations can be found in Table 4. From the table, it can be inferred that the adjusted R² value for the brand equity variable is 0.912, indicating a strong relationship. For the WOM variable, the adjusted R² value for WOM is 0.444, indicating a moderate relationship, while the adjusted R² value for e-WOM and BE are 0.771, indicating a strong relationship.

Table 4. Adjusted R-Squared

Variable	Adjusted R-squared
BE	0.912
WOM	0.444
e-WOM	0.771

Structural Model

The purpose of hypothesis testing is to investigate the direct and indirect influences of the independent on the dependent variable. The criteria for testing are to determine if the path coefficient is positive and the P-Value is less than 0.05. If these criteria are met, it is considered that there is a positive and significant relationship between the independent and dependent variable (refer to Table 5 and Figure 1).

Table 5. Direct Effect and Mediating Testing

Hypothesis	IV	MV	DV	Coefficient	Indirect Coefficient	SE	P-Value
H1	SMM	-	WOM	0.666	-	0.062	***
H2	SMM	-	e-WOM	0.878	-	0.060	***
H3	SMM	-	BE	0.924	-	0.055	***
H4	WOM	-	BE	0.175	-	0.068	***
H5	e-WOM	-	BE	0.454	-	0.065	***
H6	SMM	WOM	BE	-	0.515	0.064	***
H7	SMM	e-WOM	BE	-	0.393	0.064	***

Notes: *** = significant at $p < 0.0001$; SMM=social media marketing; BE=brand equity; WOM=word-of-mouth; e-WOM=electronic world of mouth; IV=independent variable; DV=dependent variable; MD=mediator variable

The first hypothesis (H1) tested whether SMM positively influences WOM. The results indicated that H1 was supported, as there was a significant path coefficient value of 0.666 with a p-value less than 0.001, suggesting that an enhance in SMM leads to an increase in WOM. The second hypothesis (H2) examined whether SMM has a positive effect on e-WOM. The statistical analysis showed that H2 was supported, as the path coefficient value was 0.924 with a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating that SMM can positively influence e-WOM. Hypothesis 3 (H3) tested whether SMM has a positive impact on BE. The findings revealed that H3 was supported, as the path coefficient value was 0.666 with a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating that an enhance in SMM can lead to

an incline in BE. Hypothesis 4 (H4) examined whether WOM positively effects BE. The findings indicated that H4 was supported, with a path coefficient value of 0.175 and a p-value of less than 0.001, suggesting that an incline in WOM can lead to an increase in BE.

Hypothesis 5 (H5) tested whether e-WOM has a positive impact on BE. The results showed that H5 was supported, with a path coefficient of 0.454 and a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating that e-WOM can have a positive influence on BE. Hypothesis 6 (H6) examined whether there is an indirect effect between SMM and BE through WOM. The statistical analysis revealed that H6 was supported, with a path coefficient value of 0.515 and a p-value of less than 0.001, suggesting that SMM can indirectly influence BE through WOM. Finally, Hypothesis 7 (H7) tested whether there is an indirect effect on the nexus between SMM and BE via e-WOM. The results indicated that H7 was supported, with a path coefficient value of 0.393 and a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating that SMM can indirectly influence brand equity through e-WOM.

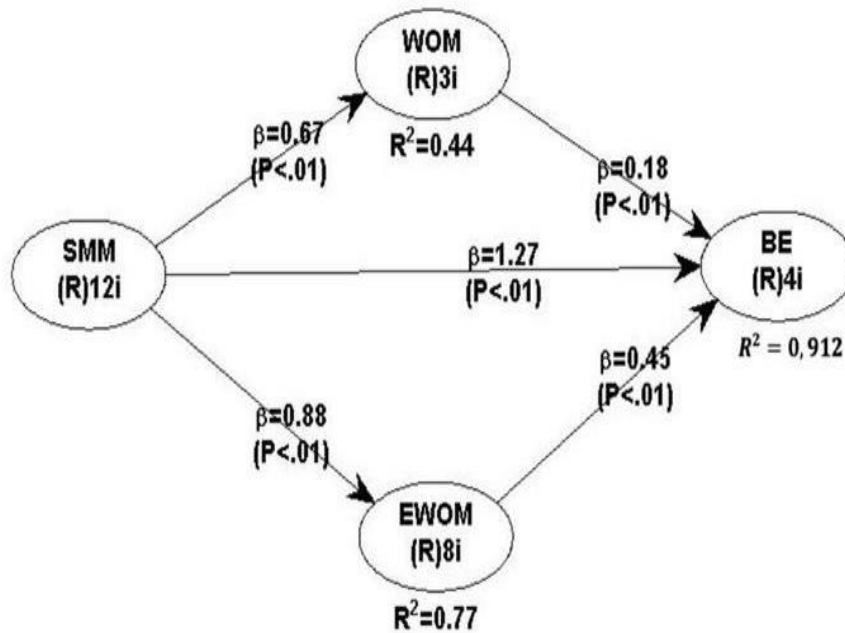


Figure 1. Model PLS Analysis

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis aims to examine the nexus between social media marketing (SMM) and word-of-mouth (WOM). The statistical calculation shows that SMM has a significant influence on WOM. This finding confirms some previous studies which reported this robust relationship (e.g., Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014; Park et al., 2021). The rationale to support this finding is that SMM can increase the exposure of a brand or product to a larger audience, including those who may not have been aware of the product or brand previously (Patma et al., 2021). This increased exposure can lead to more people talking about the brand or product, resulting in increased WOM. SMM also allows brands to engage with their followers and customers through various interactions such as comments, likes, shares, and retweets. When a brand engages with its followers, it can create a sense of community and loyalty, which can lead to more positive WOM.

The second hypothesis, which showed that SMM positively promotes on electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), is confirmed. The rationale to support this finding is that the influence of social media content that will lead the dissemination of information through e-WOM. SMM can facilitate e-WOM by creating a medium where customers can express their encounters and opinions., and for brands to engage with their audience, respond to feedback, and build relationships. SMM can be an effective strategy for generating positive e-WOM, which can enhance brand equity. The output is consistent with those of Yan et al. (2016), who explored the impact of SMM on e-WOM in social commerce. Similarly, Winarno and Indrawati (2022) pointed out that SMM which has an important

effect on E-WOM.

The third hypothesis, which mentioned that SMM has a significant effect on BE, is supported. This remarks that the greater of the SMM, the BE that the community will carry out in disseminating information on the assimilation and education facility tours. There is an influence arising from content that meets the community's daily needs, so people tend to talk about information and disseminate interesting and important information because they will feel important when disseminating this information. Thus, the results follow Fogel et al. (2010); Ebrahim (2020), who found how a product or brand is discussed through social media and confirmed that SMM has an effect on WOM. Indeed, the finding supports a prior study by Sharma and Srivastava (2017), which remarked that the key elements of marketing communication can be utilized by social media to increase customer engagement.

The following hypothesis (H4) remarked that WOM can influence BE. Based on the responses, the tourist attractions offered an experience that exceeded the respondents' expectations. As a result, it can be inferred that when people talk or share information about their experiences in tourism areas, it has a positive impact on the experience of those who listen and subsequently visit these attractions. In the tourism industry, WOM can influence BE in several ways. First, positive WOM can increase BE by creating buzz and generating interest among potential customers. Secondly, WOM can enhance BE by providing social proof and credibility. When people share positive experiences and recommend a destination or attraction, it can promote a positive perception of the brand and increase its perceived quality. This finding confirms an antecedent study (e.g., Aghdaie et al., 2015; Yaman, 2018), which mentioned that there is a robust influence of WOM and BE. Indeed, the fifth finding indicates that e-WOM can influence BE. The findings support a prior study by Priyanthi and Kerti (2020), which noted that WOM on brand equity has an important effect. The second research that links variables is Bastos and Moore (2021), the results of this study are to see the effect of e-WOM having an important effect on brand equity.

The sixth and seventh hypotheses of this study propose that both WOM and e-WOM can mediate the relationship between SMM and BE. With social media providing experiences that meet or exceed consumer expectations, individuals are inclined to share the information they receive and enhance the perceived value of a brand. These findings agree with previous studies performed by Bruhn et al. (2012), which highlights the significant effect of SMM on BE through WOM. Additionally, Sasmita and Suki (2015) conducted a study that demonstrates the influential impact of SMM on BE through WOM. Furthermore, this current study confirms the crucial role of e-WOM in elucidating the link between SMM and BE. These results suggest that higher levels of SMM usage can lead to increased brand equity through e-WOM. Moreover, e-WOM has the potential to magnify the effect of SMM on BE. By crafting content that is engaging and shareable, brands can encourage customers to disseminate information about their products or services, creating a multiplier effect where the impact of SMM is amplified through the power of e-WOM. Therefore, the outcomes of this study align with the paper performed by Seo et al. (2020), which indicates that the impact of SMM on BE through e-WOM is significant.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

This study investigates the influence of SMM and BE on WOM and e-WOM. The statistical outputs suggest that SMM has a significant impact on BE, and that WOM and e-WOM can also affect brand equity. The study also confirms that word-of-mouth and e-word of mouth play a mediating role in explaining the relationship between SMM and BE. These findings report that effective use of SMM can escalate both WOM and e-WOM, thereby enhancing BE. As such, brands and marketers should prioritize social media as a pivotal component of marketing purpose. The outputs of this research also indicates that the management of assimilation and educational-based tourism can promote through social media to increase the value of the names of tourist attractions so that the public will talk (word-of-mouth) about existing promotions. The study highlights the significance of e-WOM in mediating the nexus between SMM and BE. Brands need to focus on creating content that is not only shareable but also resonates with their audience, thereby increasing the likelihood of e-WOM. This study was limited to a certain research area in Malang of East Java

to confirm the nexus between SMM and BE. Thus, further research can expand other research areas to provide a robust implication for the theory. Moreover, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook are suggested as suitable promotional tools to prioritize in marketing efforts.

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