

The Role of Community Engagement in Enhancing Brand Equity Through Brand Trust: A Study of Barudak Kalunar

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Abstract.

This study examines the role of community engagement in enhancing brand equity through brand trust within the Barudak Kalunar community. The research investigates how participation, interaction, and emotional value influence community engagement, how engagement enhances brand trust, and the strategic implications of brand trust in strengthening brand equity. A quantitative approach was employed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). Data were collected from 200 active members of the Barudak Kalunar community using structured questionnaires with Likert-scale measurements. The results indicate that participation and emotional value significantly influence community engagement, while interaction does not show a significant effect. Furthermore, community engagement significantly enhances brand trust, and brand trust plays a critical role in strengthening brand equity. These findings highlight that emotional attachment and active participation are more influential than communication frequency in building meaningful engagement and trust. The study provides strategic implications for community-based branding by emphasizing systematic trust-building mechanisms as a pathway toward sustainable brand equity development.

Keywords: Community engagement; brand trust; brand equity; participation and emotional value.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of the fashion industry, particularly within the modest fashion segment, has intensified competition among local brands in Indonesia. As market competition increases, brand equity has become a critical strategic asset that determines long-term sustainability and differentiation. Brand equity reflects the value embedded in consumers' perceptions, associations, and loyalty toward a brand. In contemporary marketing environments, such value is no longer shaped solely by product attributes but also by relational and experiential factors. One strategy increasingly adopted by fashion brands is the development of brand communities. Brand communities provide platforms where consumers interact, share experiences, and develop a sense of belonging. These interactions are expected to strengthen emotional connections and enhance brand attachment. Kalunar, a local fashion brand based in Bandung, has developed a consumer community known as Barudak Kalunar.

The community actively engages members through digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, as well as offline gatherings and collaborative activities. Despite high engagement levels, internal data indicate a discrepancy between community activity and purchasing contribution. Approximately 75% of members are active in daily interactions, yet only around 9% contribute significantly to total sales. This phenomenon suggests that engagement within the community does not automatically translate into brand loyalty or purchase behavior. The existence of this gap highlights the need to examine the mechanisms through which community engagement influences brand-related outcomes. Previous research has demonstrated that participation, interaction, and emotional value are essential dimensions of community engagement. Furthermore, brand trust has been identified as a potential mediating factor linking engagement to brand equity. However, empirical evidence in the context of emerging local fashion brands remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine how community engagement contributes to brand equity through the mediating role of brand trust within the Barudak Kalunar community.

II. METHODS

This research adopts a quantitative design to examine causal relationships among participation, interaction, emotional value, community engagement, brand trust, and brand equity. Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was employed due to its suitability for predictive models involving multiple latent constructs. Data were collected from 200 active members of the Barudak Kalunar community using a structured questionnaire distributed online. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Measurement items were adapted from established scales in prior studies to ensure construct validity and reliability. The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Second, the structural model was examined to test the proposed hypotheses and assess the significance of path relationships among variables.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model

The evaluation of the measurement model demonstrates that all retained indicators meet the required thresholds. Outer loadings exceed 0.70 after the removal of indicators that did not satisfy convergent validity criteria. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are above 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity. Composite Reliability values exceed 0.70, confirming internal consistency.

Table 1. Outer Loading Results

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading
Participation (X1)	X1.2	0.881
	X1.3	0.924
	X1.4	0.913
Interaction (X2)	X2.1	0.882
	X2.2	0.895
	X2.3	0.834
	X2.4	0.742
Emotional Value (X3)	X3.3	0.787
	X3.4	0.927
Brand Trust (Y1)	Y1.1	0.853
	Y1.2	0.870
	Y1.3	0.814
	Y1.4	0.834
Brand Equity (Y2)	Y2.1	0.836
	Y2.2	0.897
	Y2.3	0.841
	Y2.4	0.789
Community Engagement (Z1)	Z1.1	0.910
	Z1.2	0.928
	Z1.3	0.894
	Z1.4	0.853

Structural Model

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.071 indicates a satisfactory model fit. The hypothesis testing results reveal that participation significantly influences community engagement, while interaction does not demonstrate a significant effect. Emotional value significantly affects community engagement. Community engagement significantly enhances brand trust, and brand trust significantly strengthens brand equity.

Discussion

The findings indicate that participation and emotional value are primary drivers of community engagement. Active involvement in discussions and activities reinforces members' psychological attachment to the community. Emotional connection, including feelings of belonging and pride, appears to play an even more influential role in sustaining engagement. The absence of a significant relationship between interaction and

engagement suggests that communication frequency alone does not guarantee meaningful involvement. Interaction may remain superficial if not accompanied by emotional resonance or active contribution. This finding highlights the importance of quality rather than quantity of communication within digital communities. Community engagement significantly enhances brand trust, suggesting that repeated positive experiences within the community foster perceptions of reliability and authenticity. Brand trust, in turn, strengthens brand equity by reinforcing positive associations, perceived quality, and loyalty intentions. The results support the notion that trust serves as a psychological mechanism that transforms social engagement into long-term brand value.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that brand equity within the Barudak Kalunar community is developed through a structured relational pathway. Participation and emotional value foster community engagement, engagement strengthens brand trust, and trust ultimately enhances brand equity. The findings suggest that brands seeking to leverage community-based strategies should prioritize emotional bonding and meaningful participation rather than focusing solely on communication intensity. Strategically, community programs should be designed to cultivate emotional attachment and encourage active member contribution. Simultaneously, transparent communication and consistent product performance are essential to maintaining trust. By integrating engagement and trust-building mechanisms, brands can transform community involvement into sustainable brand equity.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Dr. Ilma Aulia Zaim for her valuable guidance, constructive feedback, and continuous support throughout the completion of this research. Appreciation is also extended to the members of the Barudak Kalunar community who willingly participated in the survey and contributed meaningful insights to this study. Finally, the author acknowledges Institut Teknologi Bandung for providing academic resources and a supportive research environment.

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