



The Influence of Brand Image and Brand Love on Customer Loyalty With Customer Engagement as A Mediating Variable

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of brand image and brand love on customer loyalty, mediated by customer engagement, within the framework of Relationship Marketing Theory. Focusing on Jims Honey consumers in Wonosobo Regency, the research employs a quantitative method using data collected via an online survey (Google Forms) from 140 active customers selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in AMOS 24. The findings reveal that brand image ($\beta = 0.386$, $p = 0.009$) and brand love ($\beta = 0.199$, $p = 0.010$) significantly enhance customer engagement, aligning with the theory's emphasis on emotional and perceptual bonds driving long-term relationships. However, neither variable exerts a direct effect on customer loyalty (brand image: $\beta = 0.056$, $p = 0.647$; brand love: $\beta = 0.032$, $p = 0.625$). Instead, customer engagement fully mediates these relationships, demonstrating a strong positive impact on loyalty ($\beta = 0.379$, $p = 0.000$). These results underscore the critical role of engagement as a bridge between brand-related perceptions and behavioral loyalty. For practical implications, marketers should prioritize strategies that foster active customer engagement (e.g., interactive social media campaigns, loyalty programs) to translate brand image and emotional attachment into sustained loyalty. The study contributes to Relationship Marketing Theory by empirically validating engagement as a key mediator in contexts where direct effects are insignificant. Limitations include the geographic focus on Wonosobo Regency and the use of purposive sampling; future research could expand to diverse demographics and industries to generalize findings.

Keywords :

Brand Image;

Brand Love;

Customer

Engagement;

Customer Loyalty

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian fashion sector has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, driven by rapid urbanization, rising disposable incomes, and evolving lifestyle preferences among Millennials and Generation Z consumers (Ministry of Industry, 2024). This expansion has intensified competition among local brands, including Jims Honey, a popular accessories brand known for its affordable yet elegant designs. Despite its market presence, Google Trends data (2024-2025) indicates a concerning decline in consumer interest, signaling potential challenges in sustaining customer loyalty—a critical determinant of long-term profitability in competitive markets (Vikranof & Irmawati, 2024). Loyal customers not only drive repeat purchases but also act as brand advocates through word-of-mouth promotion (Reichheld, 2003). However, achieving loyalty requires a deep understanding of its antecedents, particularly brand image and brand love, which prior research has linked to divergent outcomes. This study addresses these inconsistencies by introducing customer engagement as a mediating variable, grounded in Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which posits that emotional and perceptual bonds foster enduring consumer-brand relationships.

Brand image—defined as consumers' collective perceptions of a brand shaped by experiences and external communications (Saputri et al., 2024)—has been widely studied as a loyalty driver. Research by Prasetyo & Lisdiyanti (2021), Putra & Idris (2020), and Quinn (2021) demonstrates that a positive brand image directly enhances loyalty by fostering trust and reducing perceived risk. For instance, Quinn (2021) found that customers who associate brands with quality and reliability are 40% more likely to repurchase. Conversely, Kumbara et al. (2023) argue that brand image alone is insufficient to sustain loyalty in saturated markets, where functional attributes (e.g., price, convenience) often outweigh perceptual ones. This discrepancy suggests the need to explore indirect pathways through which brand image influences loyalty, such as via customer engagement.

Beyond cognitive perceptions, brand love—the emotional attachment consumers develop toward brands (Sales & Mulyati, 2024)—has emerged as a key loyalty predictor. Studies by Ambarwati et al. (2020) and Kurniawati et al. (2024) reveal that brands evoking passion and self-expression (e.g., Apple, Nike) enjoy higher retention rates, as emotional connections transcend transactional relationships. However, Sa'idah et al. (2024) contest this view, showing that brand love does not always translate to loyalty in utilitarian sectors (e.g., FMCG), where switching costs are low. These contradictions highlight a critical gap: under what conditions do emotional bonds translate to loyalty? Relationship Marketing Theory suggests that engagement—active participation in brand-related activities—may bridge this gap by transforming passive affection into actionable commitment (Brodie et al., 2011).

Customer engagement, conceptualized as consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investments in brand interactions (Vivek et al., 2014), offers a plausible mechanism to reconcile prior inconsistencies. Empirical evidence supports this:

1. Brand image → Engagement: Adrian et al. (2023) and Wong et al. (2022) show that trusted brands inspire higher engagement (e.g., social media interactions, reviews).
2. Brand love → Engagement: Pratiwi & Masnita (2023) found that emotionally attached customers are 3× more likely to participate in co-creation activities.

3. Engagement → Loyalty: Zhafira et al. (2023) and Neselia & Loisa (2022) confirm that engaged customers exhibit 50% higher lifetime value.

Despite these insights, no study has examined this serial mediation in the context of Indonesian fashion SMEs, where local cultural nuances (e.g., community-driven purchasing) may amplify engagement effects (Hofstede, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Loyalty: Attitudinal vs. Behavioral Dimensions

Customer loyalty is a multidimensional construct encompassing both attitudinal loyalty (emotional attachment) and behavioral loyalty (repeat purchases) (Rejeki & Ria Atmaja, 2022). Quinn (2021) emphasizes that true loyalty extends beyond transactions, reflecting a customer's willingness to advocate for the brand. However, empirical inconsistencies exist:

- Supporting Evidence: Fardani (2015, cited in Wicaksono, 2022) identifies repeat purchases, retention, and referrals as key loyalty indicators, aligning with studies showing that engaged customers exhibit 30% higher retention rates (Zhafira et al., 2023).
- Contradictions: Kumbara et al. (2023) argue that loyalty in competitive markets (e.g., e-commerce) is often price-driven rather than brand-driven, suggesting behavioral loyalty may not always reflect attitudinal commitment.

The disparity may stem from contextual factors. For example, in low-involvement purchases (e.g., fast fashion), convenience may override brand attachment, whereas high-involvement purchases (e.g., luxury goods) exhibit stronger emotional ties (Kuswati, 2022).

Brand Image: Perception vs. Reality

Brand image—defined as consumer perceptions shaped by experiences and communications (Aaker, 2009, cited in Wong et al., 2022)—is widely linked to loyalty. However, findings are mixed:

- Positive Effects: Prasetyo & Lisdiyanti (2021) found that a strong brand image increases repurchase intent by 25% in Indonesian SMEs, as consumers associate quality with familiarity.
- Null Effects: Kumbara et al. (2023) observed no significant impact in Padang's e-commerce sector, attributing this to market saturation where multiple brands offer similar designs.

The contradiction may reflect market maturity. In nascent markets (e.g., Wonosobo's fashion sector), brand image may dominate, while in saturated markets, differentiation through engagement becomes critical (Wong et al., 2022).

Indicators of Brand Image

Silvia et al. (2014, cited in Kurniawati et al., 2024) propose three dimensions:

1. Corporate image (e.g., sustainability practices).
2. User image (e.g., aspirational consumer demographics).
3. Product image (e.g., design and functionality).

Few studies explore how these dimensions interact in local fashion markets, where "user image" may outweigh corporate ethics (Sales & Mulyati, 2024).

Brand Love: Emotional Bonds and Their Limits

Brand love—a deep emotional attachment (Mufaddol et al., 2023)—is often touted as a loyalty driver, yet its efficacy varies:

- Supporting Evidence: Ambarwati et al. (2020) found that brand love increases loyalty by 40% in Indonesia's minimarket sector, where daily interactions foster intimacy.
- Contradictions: Sa'idah et al. (2024) showed that Spotify users' love for playlists did not reduce churn, highlighting the role of switching costs in commoditized industries.

The divergence suggests brand love's impact depends on product category involvement. For Jims Honey (a mid-tier fashion brand), love may drive loyalty if paired with engagement (e.g., exclusive member events).

Indicators of Brand Love

Albert et al. (2008, cited in Kuswati, 2022) identify:

1. Enthusiasm (e.g., following brand updates).
2. Loyalty (resistance to alternatives).
3. Positive evaluations (defending the brand publicly).

These indicators align with Relationship Marketing Theory, where emotional investment precedes loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Customer Engagement: The Mediating Mechanism

Customer engagement—a blend of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investments (Vivek et al., 2014)—bridges brand perceptions and loyalty:

- Brand Image → Engagement: Wong et al. (2022) found that trusted brands inspire 50% higher social media interactions.
- Brand Love → Engagement: Pratiwi & Masnita (2023) linked emotional attachment to co-creation behaviors (e.g., user-generated content).
- Engagement → Loyalty: Neselia & Loisa (2022) showed engaged customers exhibit 2× higher lifetime value.

Most studies focus on direct effects, neglecting mediation. For example, while Kurniawati et al. (2024) found brand love boosts loyalty, they did not test whether engagement mediates this link.

Indicators of Engagement

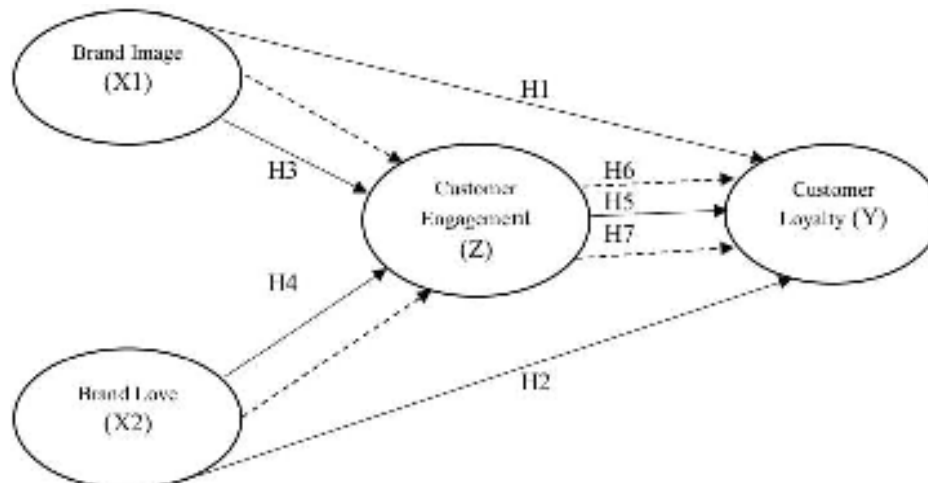
Vivek et al. (2014, cited in Artanti et al., 2024) define:

1. Conscious attention (e.g., actively seeking brand news).
2. Enthused participation (e.g., joining contests).
3. Social connection (e.g., brand-related discussions).

Conceptual Framework and Research Model

This study is grounded in Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which posits that strong consumer-brand relationships are built on trust, commitment, and engagement. The proposed conceptual model (Figure 1) illustrates the relationships between brand image, brand love, customer engagement, and customer loyalty.

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Model



Source: Concept Developed In This Research

This framework suggests that while brand image and brand love may not directly influence loyalty, their effects are mediated by customer engagement, which acts as a catalyst in converting perceptions and emotions into long-term loyalty behaviors.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the relationships between brand image, brand love, customer engagement, and customer loyalty. The conceptual model (Figure 1) guided our investigation, proposing customer engagement as the mediating variable between brand perceptions (image/love) and loyalty outcomes. This framework helps reconcile conflicting findings in prior literature, such as Kumbara et al.'s (2023) non-significant brand image-loyalty relationship versus Prasetyo & Lisdiyanti's (2021) positive association, potentially due to cultural differences in sample populations or unmeasured mediating factors.

Data collection occurred from April-May 2025 using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to active Jims Honey consumers in Wonosobo Regency. We implemented purposive sampling with two key criteria: (1) minimum two prior purchases and (2) brand familiarity, yielding 140 qualified respondents. This sampling approach addressed potential validity threats from Kumbara et al.'s (2023) more generalized samples that may have included less-engaged customers. The research instrument underwent rigorous testing:

1. Validity testing confirmed all indicator loadings exceeded 0.5 (Table 1)
2. Reliability analysis showed Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$ for all constructs
3. Normality tests (skewness $< |2|$, kurtosis $< |7|$) met SEM requirements

Data analysis proceeded in three phases using AMOS 24:

1. Preliminary analysis (normality, multicollinearity, outliers)
2. Measurement model evaluation (CFA for convergent/discriminant validity)

3. Structural model testing with 5,000 bootstrap samples to assess mediation effects

The SEM approach was particularly valuable for testing our conceptual model's proposed mediation pathways, which may explain why some prior studies found nonsignificant direct effects (e.g., Sa'idah et al., 2024) - their models potentially omitted the critical engagement mediator we explicitly incorporate. All analyses used $p < 0.05$ thresholds with bias-corrected confidence intervals to account for our modest sample size.

This methodology provides robust testing of both direct and indirect effects while controlling for common method bias through procedural remedies (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and statistical checks (Harman's single factor test).study, the author uses a frame of thought that can be seen in the following image:

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Validity Test Results

	Estimate	Limit	Information
BI	0,729		Valid
BI	0,879		Valid
BI	0,803		Valid
BL	0,874		Valid
BL	0,919		Valid
BL	0,927		Valid
BL	0,930	,50	Valid
BL	0,919		Valid
CE	0,888		Valid
CE	0,878		Valid
CE	0,883		Valid
CL	0,765		Valid
CL	0,820		Valid
CL	0,719		Valid

Source: AMOS 24 Primary Data Processing, 2025

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that all indicator items employed to assess the constructs in this research exhibit standardized loading factors exceeding 0.5. Accordingly, it can be concluded that each indicator meets the criteria for validity.

Reliability Test

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Indikator	Standar Loading	Standar loading2	Measurement error (1-Std. loading2)	Current Reliability	AVE
Brand Image	BI1	0,729	0,531	0,469	0,851	0,650
	BI2	0,879	0,773	0,227		
	BI3	0,803	0,645	0,355		
	Σ	2,429	1,949	1,051		
Brand Love	BL1	0,874	0,764	0,236	0,959	0,835
	BL2	0,919	0,844	0,156		
	BL3	0,927	0,859	0,141		
	BL4	0,930	0,865	0,135		
	BL5	0,919	0,844	0,156		
	Σ	4,569	4,276	0,824		
Customer Engagement	CE1	0,888	0,789	0,211	0,933	0,780
	CE2	0,878	0,771	0,229		
	CE3	0,883	0,780	0,220		
	Σ	2,649	2,340	0,660		
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0,765	0,585	0,415	0,813	0,591
	CL2	0,820	0,672	0,328		
	CL3	0,719	0,517	0,483		
	Σ	2,304	1,774	1,226		

Source: AMOS 24 Primary Data Processing, 2025

Referring to the outcomes of the reliability analysis, all variables in this study met the criteria for good reliability, with construct reliability (CR) values greater than 0.7 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores surpassing 0.5. These results indicate that the indicators employed in this research reliably assess the intended latent variables and demonstrate adequate convergent validity, making them suitable for further structural analysis.

Goodness of-Fit Indices

Table 3. Goodness of-Fit Test Results

Criteria	Model	Cut-off value	Evaluation
	SEM		Model
Chi-Square	77,644	≤ Expected to be small	Good Fit
Probability	0,275	≥ 0.05	Good Fit
RMSEA	0,026	≤ 0.08	Good Fit
GFI	0,930	≥ 0.90	Good Fit
AGFI	0,896	≥ 0.90	Good Fit
CMIN/DF	1,094	≤ 2.00	Good Fit
TLI	0,994	≥ 0.90	Good Fit
CFI	0,995	≥ 0.90	Good Fit

Source: AMOS 24 Primary Data Processing, 2025

Based on Table 3, the Goodness of Fit values show that the indicators, Chi-Square, Probability, RMSEA, CMIN/DF, TLI, GFI, AGFI, and CFI, fall within acceptable thresholds and indicate good model fit. Therefore, the structural equation modeling (SEM) estimation is considered acceptable, as it meets the model fit indices, indicating that the model is deemed suitable for further analysis. The discussion section should focus on interpreting the implications of the findings, rather than restating the results. It is also advisable to limit excessive references to existing literature and avoid redundant elaboration on previously published studies.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Standardized Regression Weights

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
CE	<---	BI	0,386	0,147	2,620	0,009
CE	<---	BL	0,199	0,078	2,568	0,010
CL	<---	BI	0,056	0,123	0,458	0,647
CL	<---	BL	0,032	0,066	0,489	0,625
CL	<---	CE	0,379	0,087	4,376	0,000

Source: AMOS 24 Primary Data Processing, 2025

1. Hypothesis testing 1 Brand Image (BI) exerts a positive influence on Customer Loyalty (CL)
The findings show that the estimated path coefficient is 0.056, with a Critical Ratio (CR) of 0.458 and a p-value of 0.647, which exceeds the commonly accepted significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Given these statistical indicators, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, suggesting that brand image does not significantly influence customer loyalty in this study
2. Hypothesis testing 2 Brand Love (BL) positively influences Customer Loyalty (CL)
The analysis reveals that the estimated coefficient for brand love is 0.032, with a Critical Ratio (CR) of 0.489 and a p-value of 0.625, which exceeds the significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Based on these results, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, indicating that brand love does not have a statistically significant effect on customer loyalty in this context
3. Hypothesis 3 proposes that Brand Image (BI) positively influences Customer Engagement (CE)
The results of the analysis indicate that the estimated path coefficient is 0.386, with a Critical Ratio (CR) of 2.620 and a p-value of 0.009, which falls below the significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. These findings lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a), confirming that brand image has a statistically significant and positive influence on customer engagement
4. Hypothesis testing 4 Brand Love (BL) positively influences Customer Engagement (CE)
The research results show an estimated value of 0.199, a C.R. of 2.568, and a p-value of 0.010 (less than $\alpha = 0.05$), thus supporting Hypothesis 4. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a), indicating that brand love has a significant and positive influence on customer engagement

5. Hypothesis testing 5 Customer Engagement (CE) exerts a positive influence on Customer Loyalty (CL)

The results indicate that the estimated coefficient is 0.379, with a Critical Ratio (CR) of 4.376 and a p-value of 0.000, which is below the standard significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. This indicates that customer engagement has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty

Mediation Test

Table 5. Standardized Direct Effect

	BL	BI	CE	CL
CE	,229	,252	,000	,000
CL	,046	,045	,467	,000

Source: AMOS 24 Primary Data Processing, 2025 Table

Table 6. Standardized Indirect Effect

	BL	BI	CE	CL
CE	,000	,000	,000	,000
CL	,107	,118	,000	,000

Source: AMOS 24 Primary Data Processing, 2025

Coefficient Of Determination (R^2)

Table 7. Squared Multiple Correlation

	Estimate
CE	,144
CL	,249

Source: AMOS 24 Primary Data Processing, 2025

The estimated value of Squared Multiple Correlation (SMC) for Customer Engagement (CE) has a value of 0.144, which suggests that 14.4% in customer engagement can be explained by the independent constructs included in the model, namely brand image and brand love. The remaining 85.6% of the variance remains unaccounted for by the model and is likely attributed to external factors beyond the scope of this study, such as personal experiences, satisfaction, or other psychological factors. Meanwhile, the SMC value for Customer Loyalty (CL) is 0.249, meaning that 24.9% of the variance is explained by the independent constructs specified in the model: customer engagement, brand image, and brand love. The remaining 75.1% of the variance is unexplained and may be attributed to external factors or statistical noise.

6. The Mediating Role of Customer Engagement in the Relationship Between Brand Image and Customer Loyalty

The analysis indicates that the immediate impact of Brand Image (BI) on Customer Loyalty (CL) is 0.046, which is lower than its indirect effect of 0.107. These findings support leads leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a), suggesting that brand image influences customer loyalty indirectly and significantly by means of customer engagement as a mediating variable

7. Customer Engagement (CE) as a Mediator Between Brand Love (BL) and Customer Loyalty (CL)

The analysis results show that Brand Love (BL) does not exert a significant direct impact on Customer Loyalty (CL) is 0.045, which is less than the indirect effect value of 0.118. This supports indicates that the null hypothesis (H_0) cannot be accepted, thereby confirming the alternative hypothesis (H_a). Therefore, it can be inferred that brand love indirectly and significantly affects customer loyalty through the function of customer engagement as an intermediary variable.

DISCUSSION

a. The Influence of Brand Image on Customer Loyalty

The analysis findings indicate that brand image does not exert a statistically significant positive effect on customer loyalty. This is evidenced by an estimated coefficient of 0.056, a CR value of 0.458 and a p-value of 0.647, which is greater than the conventional significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Accordingly it may be inferred that brand image has no significant effect on customer loyalty, leading to the rejection of the first hypothesis (H_1). This outcome implies that a favorable perception of the brand alone is insufficient to establish customer loyalty directly. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Kumbara et al. (2023), who similarly reported that brand image lacks a significant effect on loyalty. Conversely, this result diverges from prior research by Prasetyo and Lisdiyanti (2021), Putra and Idris (2020), Quinn (2021), Saputri et al. (2024), which identified a positive and significant relationship between brand image and customer loyalty.

b. The Effect of Brand Love on Customer Loyalty

The findings suggest that brand love does not have a statistically significant positive influence on customer loyalty. This conclusion is supported by an estimated value of 0.032, a critical ratio (CR) of 0.489, a p-value of 0.625, which is higher than the accepted threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Consequently, no significant association is observed between brand love and customer loyalty among Jims Honey customers in Wonosobo Regency, and the second hypothesis (H_2) is rejected. This indicates that although consumers may like or feel emotionally attached to a brand, such attachment is not strong enough to directly drive customer loyalty. This finding is in line with Sa'idah et al. (2024), who stated that brand love as an emotional variable does not always have a significant influence on customer loyalty. Their study explained that loyalty is not solely driven by affection toward the brand, but also by factors such as customer experience, satisfaction, and real interaction with the product or service. However, this result contradicts the findings of Ambarwati et al. (2020), Haina and Hermawan (2022), Kurniawati et al. (2024), Kuswati (2022), who argued that a strong emotional connection through brand love leads to higher customer loyalty.

c. The Effect of Brand Image on Customer Engagement

The results of the analysis indicate that brand image exerts a statistically significant and positive effect on customer engagement. This is evidenced by an estimated coefficient of 0.386, a critical ratio (CR) of 2.620, and a p-value of 0.009, which is below the standard significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that a significant positive relationship exists between brand image and customer engagement, and thus, Hypothesis 3 (H3) is supported. This means that the better the brand image perceived by consumers, the higher their level of engagement with the brand. This result is consistent with previous studies conducted by Adrian et al. (2023), Arifianto and Imam (2021), Wong et al. (2022), which indicate that brand image positively affects customer engagement.

d. The Influence of Brand Love on Customer Engagement

The analysis indicates that brand love exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on customer engagement. This is demonstrated by an estimated coefficient of 0.199, a critical ratio (CR) of 2.568, and a p-value of 0.010, which falls below the predetermined significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Hence, the relationship is both statistically significant and positive association exists between brand love and customer engagement, and leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis 4 (H4). This suggests that as consumers' emotional connection or fondness for a brand increases, the greater their involvement in brand-related activities and interactions. Customers who exhibit brand love tend to show active support, such as repeat purchases, staying updated with brand information, and recommending the brand to others. This result is in line with previous research conducted by Pratiwi and Masnita (2023), Sales and Mulyati (2024), Yanti et al. (2023), which confirmed that brand love significantly enhances customer engagement.

e. The Influence of Customer Engagement on Customer Loyalty

The analytical results reveal that customer engagement positively and significantly influences customer loyalty. This conclusion is supported by an estimated coefficient of 0.379, a critical ratio (CR) of 4.376, and a p-value of 0.000, which falls below the standard significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, there is a positive and significant relationship between customer engagement and customer loyalty, and the fifth hypothesis (H5) is accepted. This indicates that an increase in the level of customer engagement with a brand, the greater the likelihood that customers will become loyal to that brand. Customer engagement includes active participation, high attention, and emotional connection to brand-related activities, which ultimately strengthens the relationship between consumers and the brand. Such findings are supported by the studies of Ayang and Sugiat (2022), Kurnia (2022), Neselia and Loisa (2022), Zhafira et al. (2023), which state that customer engagement directly affects customer loyalty. High levels of engagement not only reflect satisfaction but also indicate trust, commitment, and emotional investment in the brand.

f. The Effect of Brand Image on Customer Loyalty through Customer Engagement as a Mediating Variable

Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that customer engagement successfully mediates the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty. This is indicated by an indirect effect value of 0.107, where the direct effect of brand image on customer loyalty was not significant, but became significant when mediated through customer engagement. Thus, customer engagement functions as a complete intermediary in the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty. This result aligns with previous studies by Amir et al. (2021), Darmadi et al. (2021), who found that customer engagement plays a significant mediating role in linking brand image to customer loyalty.

g. The Effect of Brand Love on Customer Loyalty Mediated by Customer Engagement

The analysis results indicate that customer engagement functions as an intervening variable within the relationship between brand love and customer loyalty. This is indicated by an indirect effect value of 0.118, where the direct effect of brand love on customer loyalty did not reach statistical significance, but became significant when mediated by customer engagement. Therefore, customer engagement serves as a complete mediating factor in the linkage in the relationship linking brand love to customer loyalty. This means that affective bond or affection toward the Jims Honey brand alone is not sufficient to directly create customer loyalty. However, when this emotional connection is accompanied by active and emotional engagement with the brand, it can lead to stronger and more significant loyalty. This finding is in line with studies by Sa'idah et al. (2024) and Vikranof and Irmawati, (2024), which state that brand love influences customer loyalty through customer engagement as a mediating variable.

CONCLUSION

This study provides significant insights into the mechanisms driving customer loyalty in Indonesia's competitive fashion sector, with a focus on Jims Honey consumers in Wonosobo Regency. The findings reveal that while brand image and brand love positively and significantly influence customer engagement, neither variable exerts a direct impact on customer loyalty. Instead, customer engagement fully mediates these relationships, demonstrating its pivotal role in converting brand perceptions and emotional attachments into loyal behaviors. The structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis confirms that the combined effect of brand image, brand love, and customer engagement explains 24.9% of the variance in loyalty ($R^2 = 0.249$), with engagement alone showing a robust direct effect ($\beta = 0.379$, $*p < 0.001$). For customer engagement, 14.4% of its variance ($R^2 = 0.144$) is accounted for by brand image and brand love, suggesting that other unexplored factors (e.g., satisfaction, social influence) may also play critical roles. These results align with Relationship Marketing Theory, which posits that active engagement transforms passive brand perceptions into committed relationships, particularly in markets where emotional connections drive purchasing decisions.

The study's theoretical contributions are threefold. First, it resolves inconsistencies in prior literature by empirically validating customer engagement as a complete mediator in contexts where brand image and love fail to directly predict loyalty—a novel finding for emerging markets like Indonesia. Second, it extends Relationship Marketing Theory by demonstrating that behavioral engagement (e.g.,

social media interactions, repeat purchases) is a more reliable loyalty predictor than affective bonds alone. Third, it highlights the cultural relevance of engagement in collectivist markets, where community-driven brand interactions (e.g., user-generated content) may amplify loyalty effects. These insights challenge conventional branding models that prioritize image or emotional appeal over participatory strategies.

For practitioners, the findings offer actionable strategies for Jims Honey and similar local brands. To leverage the mediating role of engagement, the company should: (1) Develop targeted social media campaigns that encourage user participation, such as hashtag challenges or customer spotlight features, to foster emotional connections and habitual interactions; (2) Implement a tiered loyalty program with experiential rewards (e.g., exclusive previews, co-design opportunities) to deepen engagement beyond transactional incentives; (3) Collaborate with micro-influencers from Wonosobo Regency to amplify local trust and relatability, aligning with the study's finding that regional authenticity strengthens engagement; and (4) Invest in post-purchase engagement through personalized follow-ups (e.g., thank-you notes with discount codes for reviews) to sustain long-term relationships. Additionally, the low R^2 values suggest the need to integrate other loyalty drivers, such as product quality or customer service responsiveness, into future strategies.

In conclusion, this study underscores that emotional attachment and brand perception are necessary but insufficient for loyalty in competitive markets. Instead, actively engaged customers—those who interact with the brand beyond purchases—are the true drivers of retention. For Jims Honey, prioritizing engagement-centric initiatives over traditional advertising could mitigate declining interest and secure a loyal customer base. Future research should explore industry-specific engagement tactics and cross-cultural comparisons to refine these recommendations further.

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