

The impact of social media marketing on brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity in Vietnam's automotive industry



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Abstract Leveraging social media marketing is considered an effective strategy for companies in general and automakers in particular in the modern digital context. Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube serve as powerful marketing tools for enhancing brand visibility, increasing brand awareness, and building customer relationships. Although purchase and sales activities are still conducted directly at distribution agents, social networking sites have become the main platform where consumers interact and maintain communication with brands. In response to changes in consumer behavior and to stay ahead of competition, automakers can leverage social media as a strategic platform to better connect with consumers for interactive activities and cultivate more profound customer engagement, thereby strengthening brand equity. This research aims to study the impact of social media marketing on brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity in the automobile market of Vietnam. A survey of 562 car owners in Vietnam and data analyzed via SPSS 20 and AMOS 24 software revealed that important parts of social media marketing—such as customization, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and brand storytelling—help improve brand engagement and increase automobile brand equity in Vietnam. The study not only reinforces the important role of the typical customization, trendiness, and word-of-mouth components but also extends the exploitation of the effectiveness of the brand storytelling component in creating an overall social media marketing that is capable of connecting consumers' emotions, perceptions, and interactive behaviors with the brand simultaneously and potentially transcends the clutter of promotion strategies to impress and help consumers learn deeply about the brand and eventually increase brand equity. The findings of this study are expected to enrich the academic literature on social media marketing in customer engagement and brand development and serve as a useful reference for more effective online marketing solutions.

Keywords: automobile market, brand storytelling, customization, trendiness, word-of-mouth

1. Introduction

In the era of strongly growing digital technology globally, digital marketing has played an important role and created an attractive environment to engage consumers with brands. E-commerce platforms in general and social networks in particular have become important means to help consumers search for information and supply convenient shopping places for products and services, including in the automobile sector. Although the majority of automobile sales and purchase activities still occur at distribution agents, digital sales and marketing platforms have been instrumental in generating potential business opportunities and expanding market reach. According to statistics from Thinkwithgoogle & Meta in 2022, 75 percent of car shoppers stated that articles and comments on social networks have a significant influence on brand orientation, and 92 percent have researched information as well as checked prices on social media before going to a sales agent to look directly at products and make decisions. This behavior has prompted car manufacturers to implement marketing and brand promotion on social media. Researchers from various fields have discussed the concept and elements of social media marketing. Most studies that use the research results and measurement items adopted from Kim & Ko (2012) classify social media marketing for luxury goods into five components: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth. Additionally, further studies have been conducted, such as Sano (2014), who added risk perception; Koivulehto (2017), who added purchase intentions; Bilgin (2018), who added advertising and promotion; and Koay et al. (2020), who added information as other important elements of social media marketing. Moreover, Cheung et al. (2019) proposed adding a brand storytelling dimension to social media marketing elements for future research directions. In the automobile industry, automakers have quickly adapted to digital transformation and implemented social media marketing activities that tell emotional brand stories. Instead of promoting cars with dry specifications, marketers have turned them into inspirational brand stories. This study



considers social media marketing activities in the automotive sector to include customization, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and brand storytelling.

Over the years, renowned car brands have promoted and positioned themselves through compelling stories. For example, Honda's car brand has cooperated with renowned media agency Wieden+Kennedy London and director Daniel Wolfe to create an attractive and adventurous promotional story called "The Other Side" for its most successful brand, Honda Civic, and its highest-performance sports car, Civic Type R. Honda's brand storytelling method has created a distinct impact and left a strong impression on social networks because it is highly entertaining and interactive and reinforces the quality of Honda's car technology. Another example is the Land Rover car brand, which uses storytelling marketing through the scenario of adventure stories, resulting in intriguing brand experiences and consumer–brand engagement when 230 million views on social media are attracted (Lamour, 2023). Brand storytelling on social media platforms is becoming a new phenomenon in marketing that is both modern, fascinating and inspiring (Mavilinda et al., 2023). Today, brand storytelling can be integrated with entertainment, trendiness, and customization to create an overall social media marketing strategy that effectively promotes brands and enhances brand engagement across all sensory, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Customer loyalty in the fiercely competitive Vietnamese automobile market is increasingly declining due to the wide variety of domestic and foreign vehicles available, along with numerous brand choices and alternatives. Car manufacturers can effectively implement social media marketing activities to build a long-term competitive advantage and reduce customer brand switching behavior by fostering brand engagement. This research aims to study the impact of important parts of social media marketing—such as customization, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and brand storytelling—on brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity in the automobile market of Vietnam. Since then, this research has discussed future research directions and managerial implications. The findings of this study are expected to enrich the academic literature on SMM in customer engagement and brand development and serve as a valuable guide for marketers seeking to enhance their online marketing strategies.

2. Theoretical basis and literature review

2.1. Social media marketing

Social media denotes an online environment or platform that utilizes the internet and electronic technology, where consumers can search for information, share thoughts, make comments, and share their ideas (Bilgin, 2018). According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media networks allow users to create, share, and exchange information with each other as content creators in virtual communities. In a simple way, consumers participating in social networks are no longer limited to viewing content in a passive way; rather, they can express their opinions and exchange information with the seller or with other users through online applications. Accordingly, social media marketing is characterized as promotional efforts conducted by brands on social media platforms, promoting the ability to quickly access and interact with customers (Chi, 2011), encouraging brand engagement, helping to build consumer relationships, and enhancing brand equity (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Marketers in the luxury goods and automotive industries are optimizing social media marketing to cultivate relationships between consumers and brands. Social media marketing consists of several components that represent typical characteristics for implementing the necessary tactics for the business (Cheung et al., 2020). Marketers soon realize that, depending on the different product areas, marketers should apply different social media marketing components, which makes for an effective social media marketing strategy. These components of social media marketing include entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, word-of-mouth, risk perception, advertising and promotion, and information.

Entertainment: Brands that bring pleasure and fun to consumers when they use social media (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Interaction: Brands offer the ability to contribute ideas, exchange, and discuss products/services between users and businesses or among consumers on social media networks (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Trendiness: Brands consistently provide new and updated information via social media (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Customization: Brands provide customer service in a flexible way, which meets the different tastes of customers on the basis of their needs (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Word of mouth: The ability to recommend, exchange ideas, and communicate informally among brand users of a company on social media (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Risk perception: A brand has the ability to reduce consumer anxiety about products (Sano, 2014).

Advertising and promotion: Brands carry out advertising and promotion campaigns via social media networks to expand customer numbers and increase them (Bilgin, 2018).

Information: Brands inform customers about every detail of the product and the alternatives so that the customers can make the most effective choice (Koay et al., 2020).

Especially in the automotive industry, the integration of the brand storytelling dimension into social media marketing has emerged as a crucial marketing strategy for automakers. Brand storytelling is a creative marketing method based on the exploitation of stories to build strong emotions and connect with customers or to communicate about a company's vision and mission to customers (Rizkia & Oktafani, 2020). Brand storytelling marketing refers to the art of creating a compelling brand story that forms an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer (Granitz & Forman, 2015), including

characters, plots, causes and results, and the chronology of events associated with the brand (Solja et al., 2018; Fog et al., 2010). People tend to understand and remember content or messages more easily if they are organized in the scripted order of a story (Denning, 2006). In the new context, social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are leveraged as strategic platforms for automotive brands to popularize and spread stories to connect more with customers, promote products, communicate messages, and touch the hearts of consumers (Mavilinda et al., 2023). Rizkia & Oktafani (2020) demonstrated that storytelling marketing has an opportunity to create brand equity, as it makes it easier for consumers to recognize and remember brands. This study examines the addition of the brand storytelling element to social media marketing activities and clarifies its positive impact on brand engagement and brand equity among automotive companies.

2.2. Consumer-based brand equity

A brand comprises a distinct name, logo, symbol, color scheme, design, style, or a combination of these elements, serving as a unique system of identification for a business or product and distinguishing it from competitors' products or services (AMA, 1960). According to this definition, understandably, a brand is a tangible system that constitutes the enterprise's identity. The International Trademark Association (ITA) also developed a concept of a brand that is similar to the statement made by the AMA, as follows: A brand consists of words, names, symbols, or any combination thereof used in commerce to identify and differentiate the products of manufacturers or vendors. According to the ITA, the function of branding is not only to help identify the products or services of manufacturers and distinguish them from those of competitors but also to assist in determining the origin of those goods. The concept of a brand is used in business and marketing, mainly to identify products/services and bring value to sellers and buyers as brand equity (Aaker, 1991). Building brand image and enhancing brand equity have always been important core issues for marketers. There are many perspectives and methods for determining brand equity as well as measuring the factors that affect it. However, Lassar, Mittal, and Shamar (1995) identify two main approaches to consider brand equity: the financial approach and the consumer-based approach.

Financially, brand equity is measured on the basis of crystallized cash flow in the product, increasing its value and creating a differentiation between renowned products and brands compared with similar products without well-known names (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). One of the reasons for approaching this definition in this way is to value the brand for commercial purposes. It serves as an indicator for investors to evaluate their capital investments and measure the organization's performance, as brand equity is classified as a category of intangible assets on the balance sheet (Feldwick, 1996). Nevertheless, from a financial standpoint, brand equity does not encapsulate the value of its contribution to business growth. Therefore, assessing the value of brand assets requires a more comprehensive and multidimensional viewpoint, namely, from the perspective of the consumer.

In terms of consumer aspects, brand equity, as defined by Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991), reflects how consumers react, feel, perceive, and remember a brand on the basis of their experiences and beliefs about it. According to Aaker (1991), brand equity is the set of intangible assets associated with a brand, expressed through five components: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, brand loyalty, and other properties (such as patents, trademarks, distribution systems, and national origin). According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness refers to a customer's ability to recognize or recall a brand; perceived quality is the customer's assessment of a brand's value on the basis of its ability to meet their needs and expectations compared with alternative products in the same industry; brand association involves a customer's capacity to connect an image, emotion, experience, or memory with a brand; and brand loyalty signifies a customer's commitment to a specific brand. Moreover, Keller (1993) defines brand equity as the customer's understanding of a brand and the effects of that understanding on the customer's response to the brand's marketing activities in relation to its competitors. According to Keller (1993), brand understanding consists of two basic components: brand awareness and brand image. Keller's concept of brand awareness is similar to that of Aaker's, whereas brand image refers to characteristics that help individuals associate and recognize a particular brand in the consumer's memory (Keller, 1993).

With respect to brand equity, most scholars and experts in marketing have concentrated on the concept of consumer-based brand equity because it is the dominant and preferred perspective (Christodoulides & Chernatony, 2010; Almestarihi et al., 2021). Accordingly, this research uses Aaker's (1991) definition of consumer-based brand equity for Vietnamese car brands, which considers brand equity as the collection of valuable traits linked to the car brand, such as brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand awareness, that increase its value and profits in the market.

2.3. Brand engagement

Brand engagement is characterized by a strong relationship between an individual consumer and a brand (Gambetti et al., 2012). In the traditional context, brand engagement is conceptualized as a psychological state that expresses a customer's special interest and investment in the interactive relationship with the brand, represented through the three components of perception, emotion, and behavior (Hollebeek, 2011). In modern digital technology, brand engagement is viewed as the positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity of consumers toward a brand when they engage with that brand through social media interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Brand engagement is a multidimensional construct with three main

measurement dimensions: cognition, affection, and activation (Hollebeek et al., 2014). The cognitive, emotional, and activation components of brand engagement take place in a positive way as customers interact with that brand. The cognitive component refers to the brand-related thoughts that consumers form in their minds through the process of interacting with the brand. The emotional component characterizes the positive emotions that consumers experience when they interact with a brand. The activation component shows the level of effort, time, and energy that consumers spend on a brand during interactions with it (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Marketing specialists recognize brand engagement as a key focus in current marketing research (Hollebeek et al., 2016). This study adopts Hollebeek et al. (2014) definition of brand engagement in considering the important role of this factor in the automotive industry. In this context, brand engagement is viewed as the process of the cognition, emotion, and activation of consumers toward the social media marketing stimuli of car manufacturers carried out on social networks.

2.4. Social information processing (SIP) theory

To analyze the impact of social media marketing on brand engagement and brand equity, it is essential to examine online communication and interaction between automotive manufacturers and their customers. To make this more concrete, this study applies social information processing (SIP) theory. Social information processing (SIP) theory, initially proposed by Joseph Walther in 1992, posits that users of computer-mediated communication can establish relationships that are as robust as those formed through face-to-face interactions. Social information processing theory (SIP) is a theory of interpersonal communication activity developed in 1992 by Joseph Walther, which explains how people become acquainted with each other in a computer-mediated environment without the need for direct meeting signals. According to the SIP theory of Walther (1992), users who communicate through computer intermediation can develop strong relationships similar to those developed directly or even allow individuals to idealize their relationships. Several studies have recognized SIP theory and its importance in marketing. Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2017) argue that customers evaluate brands through the information they refer to via social media, which subsequently forms the perception of the brands' image and value in their minds. Perera, Nayak & Nguyen (2020) draw on SIP theory when examining the influence of social brand engagement on consumer-based brand equity in higher education from the perspective of undergraduates in Sri Lanka. The participation and engagement of learners on social media platforms enable them to gather information about institutions of higher education, facilitating their engagement with their classmates and institutions, thereby fostering distinctive brand equity in their perceptions. Students' social interactions with their peers across various social media platforms facilitate information acquisition, enhance the perceived credibility of institutional brands, foster positive word-of-mouth activities about institutions, and provide valuable brand experiences to enhance brand equity from a customer perspective (Perera et al., 2020).

Similarly, in the automotive industry, when car companies create opportunities to interact and connect with car owners via social media platforms or networks, strong customer relationships develop. Through social media marketing, automotive businesses can communicate brand-related information and build relationships with customers (Cheung et al., 2020). Moreover, as customers are increasingly seeking information regarding items and businesses via social media platforms, their awareness will increase, and their engagement with brands will increase. The interaction of car owners with others who have the same interests in automobiles in social networks helps them gather information about car brands and encourages positive word-of-mouth activities about car manufacturers, which in turn increases the trustworthiness of car brands and enhances consumer-based brand equity. The customization in social media marketing has increased the likelihood of contacting targeted consumers and providing marketing and customer care in a selective way, which strengthens relationships with brands. Accordingly, this study uses SIP theory to examine the impact of social media marketing on brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity in the automotive sector in the Vietnamese market.

3. Conceptual framework

3.1. The impact of social media marketing on brand engagement

Consumer-brand engagement represents a prominent focus in marketing research, garnering considerable scholarly attention (Cheung et al., 2020). In the modern context, brand engagement is viewed as the process of a consumer's cognitive, emotional, and activated response to branded stimuli performed on social media platforms (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Social media marketing serves as one of the most strategic and effective incentives to build and sustain brand engagement. Previous studies have determined that there is a positive relationship between social media marketing and brand engagement. Cheung et al. (2020) suggested that social media marketing is intricately connected to brand engagement and involves the formulation and execution of marketing plans that leverage social media platforms to communicate brand information and cultivate consumer relationships. Social media contributes to creating an effective environment for marketers to increase the interaction between consumers and brands, thus enhancing brand engagement in the smartphone industry (Cheung et al., 2020). Rimadias et al. (2021) reinforced the important role of social media in brand identification and brand image, especially in the development of tourism. The entertainment, electronic word-of-mouth, and interaction features of the TikTok application are the main forces that enhance brand engagement (Rimadias et al., 2021). Rossanty et al. (2024) research also presents

meaningful findings on the importance of entertainment, interaction, personalization, trending, and word-of-mouth components in social media marketing that help drive brand engagement in the premium fragrance sector. Accordingly, on the basis of the inheritance and development of the results of previous studies, this article analyzes the impact of social media components—specifically, customization, trendiness, word of mouth, and brand storytelling—on brand engagement.

3.1.1. Customization

Social media marketers can arrange and promote brand-related messages that are customized to suit the individual needs of customers (Rimadias et al., 2021; Cheung et al., 2020). Customization in online marketing is seen as the ability of a business to deliver promotional messages suitable for each individual customer on the basis of their exclusive interests on the social media platform (Li, 2016). This approach pleases customers because they enjoy reading the relevant information. When a business provides tailored services aligned with consumer preferences, it enhances the perceived quality and advantages of the brand while also enhancing sentiment toward the brand and driving activation (Cheung et al., 2020), thereby promoting brand engagement. Brand experiences with customized services on social networks help consumers feel understood and appreciated, which in turn creates strong emotional connections, reinforces perceived quality, and enhances favorable engagement with brands' personalized services (Rossanty et al., 2024). Harnessing the customization of social media marketing is seen as an effective strategy for companies in general and automakers in particular. In the current Vietnamese market, automakers have adopted a personalized way of interacting with and caring for customers on social media platforms by analyzing individual search history, thereby facilitating customers in finding information to meet specific needs in terms of price, design, and key features of each car line. Practical observations and previous studies are the basis for the proposed H1 hypothesis:

H1. The customization element of social media marketing has a positive effect on brand engagement for automobile brands in Vietnam.

3.1.2. Trendiness

Trendiness refers to social networks providing the latest news and discussion topics that are of interest and popular and are also important channels for product discovery (Rimadias et al., 2021). Trendiness in the automotive sector is demonstrated by the fact that automakers provide the latest information about new cars, modern models, or trending topics, which facilitates and helps consumers update the news in comparison to traditional marketing channels. Social media marketing trendiness positively reinforces consumers' perceptions of a brand (Manthiou et al., 2016). When a brand's content on social media reflects current trends, the brand will position itself as modern and relevant (Rossanty et al., 2024). A well-known automaker providing timely content on its website can increase brand awareness and brand association of an upscale and classy brand, as consumers perceive the brand to be leading current trends, thereby attracting their attention (Rossanty et al., 2024) and evoking their positive feelings along with driving brand loyalty intention (Cheung et al., 2020). Therefore, this provides the basis for Hypothesis 2:

H2. The trendiness element of social media marketing has a positive effect on brand engagement for automobile brands in Vietnam.

3.1.3. Word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth communication involves consumers exchanging and disseminating information regarding a product, service, brand, or company through social media platforms. The rapid expansion of digital applications and social media platforms has increased the number of consumers participating in brand reviews on forums, resulting in a surge of electronic word-of-mouth (Sun et al., 2021; Carvalho et al., 2020). The exchanges on social media between potential users and those who have already used the brand make word-of-mouth a reliable source of recommendation information, motivating consumers to invest more effort and time in reading these reviews, which helps form their attachment to the brand's social media channel (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018). According to Rimadias et al. (2021), electronic word-of-mouth is the most powerful influencer and determinant of brand engagement. According to Cheung et al. (2020), positive word-of-mouth can contribute to the establishment of positive brand recognition and awareness as well as favorable emotional relationships between a brand and consumer. In contrast, negative word-of-mouth undermines consumer trust and adversely impacts consumer–brand interactions (Rossanty et al., 2024). Therefore, this evidence provides the basis for Hypothesis 3:

H3. The word-of-mouth element of social media marketing has a positive effect on brand engagement for automobile brands in Vietnam.

3.1.4. Brand storytelling

Brands today have developed the ability to cultivate robust relationships with customers by leveraging compelling stories that foster meaningful connections with consumers and build brand engagement. Research by Mavilinda et al. (2023) has shown that the creation of captivating storytelling content has the potential to engage users on the Instagram platform in

a cognitive process, emotional experience, and interactive behavior and create brand engagement as an enhanced motivation for further favorable outcomes such as purchase decision-making. Rizkia & Oktafani (2020) demonstrated that brand storytelling can increase brand equity by helping consumers easily recognize and remember brands, thereby driving the decision to use a service. Dessart & Pitardi's (2019) research indicates that elements of brand storytelling, such as plot, character, and authenticity, help trigger consumers' engagement in three aspects—perception, emotion, and activation—in a certain order. Research by Kaushik & Senthilkumar (2025) also emphasized that storytelling plays a key role in enhancing consumers' brand engagement through intuitive storytelling techniques and visual elements. Nakhil's research (2019) has affirmed the importance of brand storytelling in building and enhancing brand engagement by creating connections with consumers on a mental and emotional level, along with drawing them into the message of the brand story instead of highlighting features of a new product or service. Today, social media is used as a useful means for automobile manufacturers to spread brand stories to promote products, make strong impressions, maintain long-term customer relationships, and strengthen brand engagement. Practical observations and previous studies are the basis for the proposed H4 hypothesis:

H4. The brand storytelling element of social media marketing has a positive effect on brand engagement for automobile brands in Vietnam.

3.2. The impact of brand engagement on the consumer-based brand equity of automobile brands

In the contemporary context of social media platform involvement, brand engagement is considered the top-priority strategy by marketers for strengthening customer relationships and maximizing consumer-based brand equity (Gambetti et al., 2012). Many recent studies have confirmed the importance of brand engagement for brand equity across various sectors. Cheung et al. (2020) research suggests that as brand engagement increases, users are encouraged to spend more time and effort interacting with the brand, thus strengthening brand recall and building brand loyalty and a favorable brand image. Similarly, Rimadias et al. (2021) affirmed that brand engagement is the main motivation for promoting brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty in the tourism industry in Indonesia. Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) identify brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty as the typical components of consumer-based brand equity; therefore, enhancing brand engagement is seen as the primary driving force behind improving brand equity. Similarly, Rossanty et al. (2024) demonstrated that a positive correlation exists between brand engagement and brand equity, with the three dominant aspects of perception, emotion, and behavior of engagement contributing to the formation of brand equity. In the context of the Vietnamese automotive market, which is full of competition with various brand choices, brand engagement is considered a key strategy to connect customers, strengthen the relationship between customers and enterprises, cultivate value for customers, and nurture consumer-based brand equity. On the basis of the above arguments, Hypothesis H5 can be proposed as follows:

H5. Brand engagement positively influences consumer-based brand equity for automobile brands in Vietnam.

From the above arguments, the author proposes the following theoretical model for this research on social information processing (SIP) theory (Figure 1):

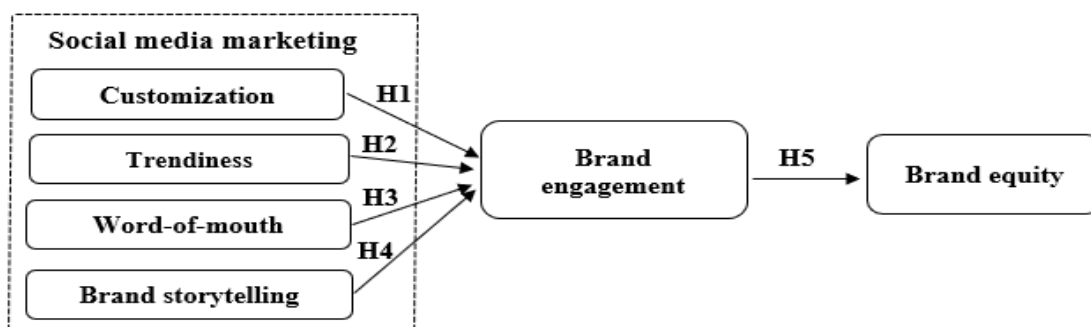


Figure 1 Proposed research framework.

4. Methods

To test the hypotheses in the research model, the author conducted an online and direct survey of automobile owners with a questionnaire on relevant issues. The research collected 562 useful pieces of feedback from those who had bought car brands in the Vietnamese market and participated in social media platforms. The data collection process involved both direct and online survey methods, employing a stratified sampling approach. The sample comprises data that are nearly representative of Vietnam's automobile market, featuring a gender distribution of 55 percent male and 44 percent female, with 46.1 percent of participants aged 18–40 years and 53.9 percent aged 41–60 years. These individuals reside in the northern, central, and southern regions of Vietnam and are owners of prominent automobile brands such as Toyota, Chevrolet, Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Land Rover, and Subaru. The questionnaire utilized 5-point Likert scales (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and incorporated measurement items derived from prior research on social media marketing, brand engagement, and consumer-based brand equity.



The collected data were processed and analyzed via quantitative methods via SPSS statistical software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 20.0 and AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) 24. The structure of social media marketing is expressed through a multidimensional scale, with the elements viewed as independent factors, including customization, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and brand storytelling. All the measurements of every element of social media marketing included three variables. We inherited the first three elements of social media marketing from Rossanty et al. (2024). The three variables of the remaining element, brand storytelling, are as follows: two variables are inherited from Rizkia & Oktafani (2020), while the marketing expert proposed one. We adopted three variables from Cheung, Pires, & Rosenberger (2020) as mediators of brand engagement. Finally, we use three variables from Rossanty et al. (2024) to measure consumer-based brand equity for automobiles.

5. Results

To assess the data collected from the response, this research employs covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM). The tools used to perform the analysis were AMOS 24 and SPSS 20.0 software. SPSS 20.0 software employs the Cronbach’s alpha tool and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to test the reliability of the items. The proposed research model and hypotheses are evaluated via the primary data gathered. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and average variance extracted (AVE) are employed to assess the measurement model.

In testing the scales’ reliability through the Cronbach’s alpha tool, the findings in Table 1 indicate that the scales of social media marketing elements impacting brand engagement and automotive brand equity are highly consistent. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the six components in the proposed study model vary from 0.74 to 0.83, with the corrected item–total correlation coefficients exceeding 0.3. Therefore, the reliability examination does not discard any of the scales. All the measurements are eligible for conducting EFA analysis.

Table 1 Measures of reliability and validity.

Variables/Items	Coding	Loading	C.A	CR	AVE
Customization	Cus		0.803	0.804	0.578
The automotive brand’s social media often shows exactly what kind of car I want to buy.	Cus2	0.846			
The automobile brand’s social media provides buy recommendations based on my specifications.	Cus1	0.769			
The automobile manufacturer’s social media offers information and advertising customized to my interests.	Cus3	0.627			
Trendiness	Trend		0.837	0.831	0.621
The content on the automotive brand’s social media is always trendy.	Trend3	0.800			
Utilizing the automobile brand’s social media platforms is fashionable.	Trend1	0.795			
All fashionable items are accessible on the automobile brand’s social media platforms.	Trend2	0.754			
Word-of-mouth	WOM		0.777	0.776	0.536
I often advise my friends to explore the car brand’s social media platforms.	WOM3	0.808			
I often urge my friends and acquaintances to utilize the car brand’s social media platforms.	WOM2	0.783			
I often communicate my purchasing experiences to friends and acquaintances via the car brand’s social media platforms.	WOM1	0.583			
Brand storytelling	Story		0.789	0.795	0.564
The car brand’s story motivates me to be a better person.	Story2	0.865			
I want to apply those values of the car brand’s story to my life.	Story3	0.712			
I want to drop comments in the comments column after watching the car brand’s story.	Story1	0.605			
Brand engagement	Engage		0.749	0.763	0.519
I experience a strong sense of positivity when utilizing this car brand (affection).	Engage1	0.785			
The utilization of this car brand incites my curiosity to acquire further knowledge about it (cognition).	Engage2	0.739			
I invest considerable time utilizing this car brand in comparison to others (activation).	Engage3	0.583			
Brand equity	BE		0.811	0.810	0.587
I can identify the emblem or insignia of the car brand (brand awareness).	BE3	0.806			
The function and engine performance of the car brand are very high (perceived quality).	BE1	0.752			
I regard myself as loyal to the car brand (brand loyalty).	BE2	0.742			

Source: The model comprises 6 scales and 18 observed variables.

For the EFA analysis, the results indicate that all variables related to social media marketing elements, which affect brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity in the automobile sector, meet the condition of having a loading factor greater than 0.5 (see Table 1). The results of the extraction and rotation method for EFA analysis indicate that the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is 0.870, and the significance of Bartlett’s test is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. The initial eigenvalue is found to be 1.040, which is greater than 1, and the cumulative value is calculated to be 71.332%, which



is greater than 50%. All the components comply with the standard, thus further substantiating the model. The pattern matrix shows that 5 factors, including customization, trendiness, word-of-mouth, brand storytelling, and brand engagement, are extracted from 15 variables. Like the dependence factor related to consumer-based brand equity, the EFA analysis reveals that one factor is made up of three variables, and the total extraction deviation is 72.530%, which is greater than 50%.

The results of the CFA analysis in Figure 2 reveal that Chi-square/df = 1.478 (<2), CFI = 0.987 (>0.9), TLI = 0.983 (>0.9), NFI = 0.960, GFI = 0.968 (>0.9), and RMSEA = 0.028 (<0.08). Therefore, the model fit indices satisfy the requirements, indicating that the critical model is appropriate. Additionally, all the variables are statistically significant because their p values are less than 0.05 in the regression weight analysis. The estimate of all variables at standardized regression weights exceeds 0.5, indicating a high degree of agreement.

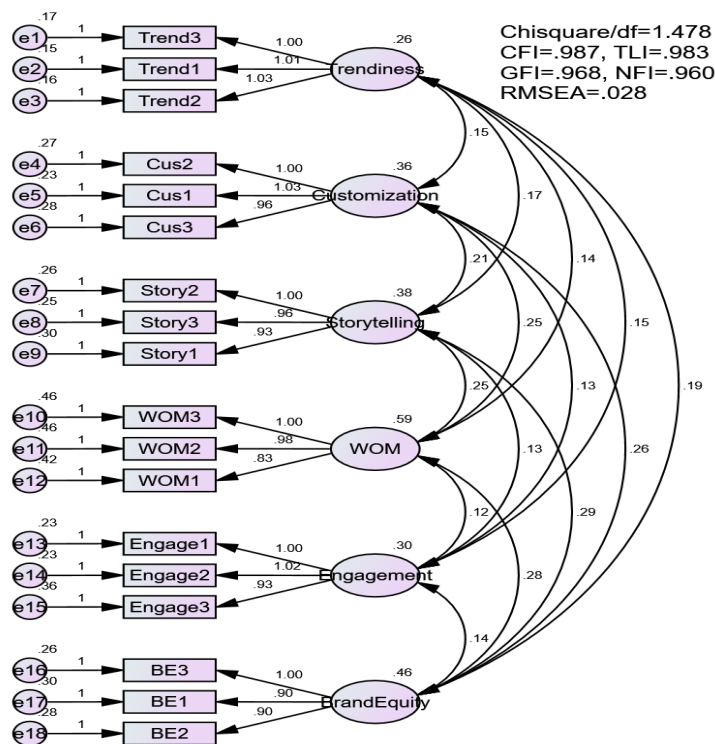


Figure 2 CFA model.

For the reliability and validity measures, the composite reliability (CR) indices of all the factors in the proposed research model are greater than 0.76, so all the measurements are very reliable (Table 1). The average variance extracted (AVE) indices of all the factors exceed 0.5, indicating that all the scales exhibit convergence. The square root of the AVE exceeds the maximum shared variance (MSV), which shows the correlation values in the rows and columns (see Table 2). Consequently, on the basis of the Fornell–Larcker criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), the study constructs of the theoretical model satisfy the need for discriminant validity.

Table 2 Assessment of discriminant validity.

	Trendiness	Customization	Brand storytelling	Word of mouth	Brand engagement	Brand equity
Trendiness	0.788					
Customization	0.491	0.760				
Brand storytelling	0.544	0.569	0.751			
Word-of-mouth	0.353	0.544	0.523	0.732		
Brand engagement	0.559	0.399	0.388	0.297	0.720	
Brand equity	0.539	0.634	0.696	0.541	0.368	0.766

Source: The authors evaluated the data via AMOS 20 software.

Figure 3 shows that the overall fit indices of the model fully satisfy the established technical criteria for testing research hypotheses via SEM: chi-square/df = 2.685 (smaller than the standard of 3); CFI = 0.949; TLI = 0.937; NFI = 0.922; GFI = 0.938 (greater than the standard of 0.9); and RMSEA = 0.055 (<0.08). All indicators in the results of the SEM analysis met the requirements and were within acceptable limits. This evidence proves that the proposed research is in keeping with market data (actual data).



Research results indicate that customization, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and brand storytelling positively influence brand engagement and brand equity, as evidenced by p values of less than 5%, confirming that all these factors are statistically significant (see Table 3 and Table 4). This finding verifies that all the hypotheses are acceptable. Furthermore, the coefficient $R^2 = 0.938$ of brand engagement signifies that social media marketing explains up to 93.8% of this factor, and the coefficient $R^2 = 0.594$ of brand equity signifies that the independent variables in the model account for 59.4% of the variation in the dependent variable.

Table 3 Regression weights of the theoretical relationships.

Hyp.	Relationship	Wei	S.E.	C.R.	P	Conclusion
H1	Customization -> Brand engagement	0.287	0.036	4.163	***	Accepted
H2	Trendiness -> Brand engagement	0.403	0.041	5.973	***	Accepted
H3	Word-of-mouth -> Brand engagement	0.166	0.025	2.699	0.007	Accepted
H4	Brand storytelling -> Brand engagement	0.327	0.037	4.492	***	Accepted
H5	Brand engagement -> Brand equity	0.778	0.187	9.119	***	Accepted

Source: The authors evaluated the data via AMOS 20 software.

Table 4 Regression weights of the indirect effect relationships.

Indirect effect relationships	Wei	P	Conclusion
Customization -> Brand engagement -> Brand equity	0.180	0.011	Significant
Trendiness -> Brand engagement -> Brand equity	0.313	0.001	Significant
Word-of-mouth -> Brand engagement -> Brand equity	0.129	0.027	Significant
Brand storytelling -> Brand engagement -> Brand equity	0.301	0.004	Significant

Source: The authors evaluated the data via AMOS 20 software.

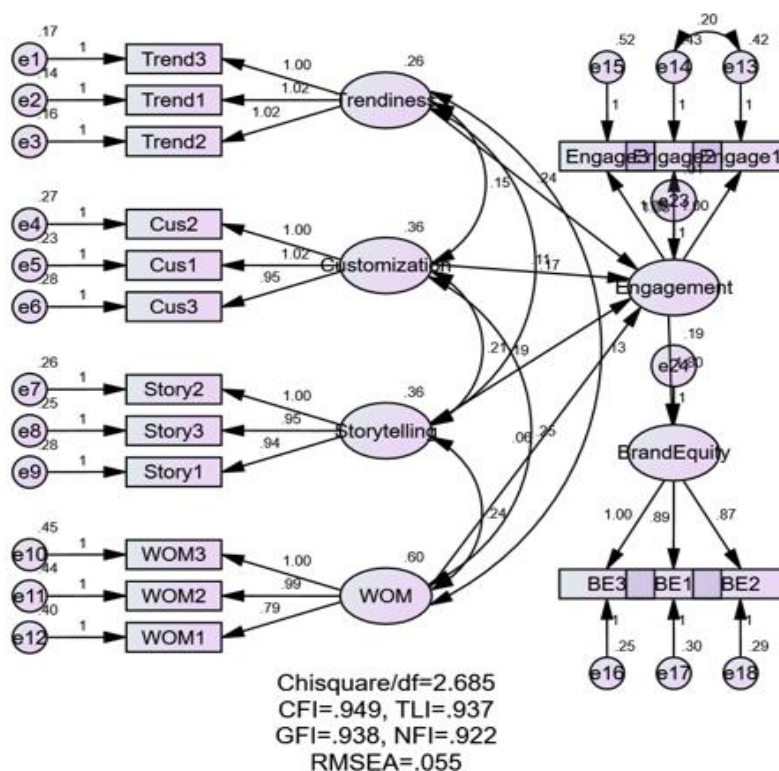


Figure 3 Evaluating research hypotheses via SEM.

6. Discussion

The results demonstrate the significant effects of social media marketing elements on brand engagement and brand equity for automobile brands in Vietnam, which is similar to the previous research results of Cheung et al. (2020), Rossanty et al. (2024), and Rimadias et al. (2021). However, the components of social media marketing and the extent to which each of these components affects brand engagement vary across studies. The accepted H1 hypothesis suggests that customization has a positive effect on brand engagement ($\beta=0.287, p=0.00$), which is similar to Rossanty et al. (2024) assertion that personalized promotion content that is tailored to each consumer's interest and need provides relevant and meaningful experiences for consumers, thereby enhancing brand engagement. In contrast, the results of Cheung et al. (2020) and Rimadias et al. (2021) are inconsistent and suggest that the relationship between customization and brand engagement is not significant at $p>0.05$.



The accepted H2 hypothesis shows that trendiness has a positive effect on brand engagement ($\beta=0.403$, $p=0.00$). This result is similar to that of Cheung et al. (2020) and Rossanty et al. (2024), who reported that updated content and the latest trends captured on social media help brands succeed in attracting consumers' attention and increasing brand engagement (Rossanty et al., 2024). On the other hand, Rimadias et al. (2021) results are contradictory and show that trendiness has a negative effect on brand engagement (t statistic < 1.96 and $p = 0.149 > 0.05$). The accepted H3 hypothesis suggests that word of mouth has a positive effect on brand engagement ($\beta=0.166$, $p=0.007$). This conclusion agrees with Cheung et al. (2020) ($\beta=0.215$, $p=0.013$), Rimadias et al. (2021) ($\beta=0.424$, $p=0.00$), and Rossanty et al. (2024). When businesses facilitate the sharing of ideas and experiences with using a product, it could motivate consumers to spend more time interacting with the brand, thereby increasing brand engagement (Cheung et al., 2020; Rimadias et al., 2021). This argument reinforces Rossanty's result that when consumers want to comment or share their purchase experiences with others on social media, it increases their engagement with the brand.

The supported H4 hypothesis proves that brand storytelling positively affects brand engagement ($\beta=0.327$, $p=0.000$). This study successfully explored and validated the effectiveness of brand storytelling when it was integrated into social media marketing to improve brand engagement. This conclusion is similar to that of Mavilinda et al. (2023); i.e., there is a positive connection between brand storytelling and brand engagement, and the value of brand engagement increases as the value of brand storytelling increases, and vice versa ($\beta=0.790$, $p=0.001$). This confirms that storytelling is an effective marketing strategy and can be integrated alongside social media to build strong emotion and create cohesion with customers in a variety of fields. Properly designed brand storytelling can help brands position themselves well in the marketplace and differentiate themselves from competitors (Rizkia & Oktafani, 2020; Mavilinda et al., 2023). The research results are similar to those of Dessart & Pitardi (2019), who reported that brand engagement is motivated by brand storytelling, in which the plot has an effective impact on cognitive engagement, the characters have an effective impact on emotional engagement, and authenticity has an effective impact on behavioral and cognitive engagement. The managerial implications of Dessart & Pitardi (2019) align with those of Mavilinda et al. (2023), who propose that marketers must consider the selection of title, plot, character, authenticity, and narrative. Additionally, the results align with those of Kaushik & Senthilkumar (2025) and Nakhil (2019), confirming that brand storytelling can intensify brand engagement. Furthermore, both studies demonstrate that brand storytelling can establish connections with customers on mental and emotional levels. The careful application of visual imagery and videos, as well as the selection of appropriate digital platforms and narratives, could significantly increase brand engagement (Kaushik & Senthilkumar, 2025; Nakhil, 2019).

Among the components of social media marketing, the trendiness element has the strongest impact on brand engagement. Thus, capturing and providing trendy content on a brand's networks leads to the brand being perceived as a premium automotive brand, which enhances the perceptual, emotional, and activated aspects of consumer-brand engagement. Moreover, interaction has the most active influence on smartphone brand engagement (Cheung et al., 2020). Word of mouth has the most dominant positive effect on brand engagement in the tourism sector in Rimadias et al. (2021) study because comments and feedback from consumers increase brand love and willingness to use the TikTok platform. The R^2 value of brand engagement is 0.938, indicating that social media marketing explains up to 93.8% of this factor, which is higher than the value reported by Rimadias et al. (2021) (0.775), Cheung et al. (2020) (0.403), and Rossanty et al. (2024) (0.320). We can assert that social media marketing effectively and appropriately connects with customers and enhances branding in Vietnam's automotive sector.

The H5 hypothesis posits a statistically significant relationship between brand engagement and brand equity, as evidenced by a p value of 0.000 and a β value of 0.778, which indicates that this relationship is forceful. Although the scale structures of brand engagement and brand equity varied across studies—previous studies by Rossanty et al. (2024), Rimadias et al. (2021), and Cheung et al. (2020) used second-order and multidimensional structures, while this research uses first-order structures—all results consistently indicate that brand engagement positively influences consumer-based brand equity in terms of brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. In Cheung et al. (2020) research, brand engagement has a strong and significant effect on brand awareness ($\beta=0.688$, $p=0.000$) and brand image ($\beta=0.805$, $p=0.000$). The findings show that brand engagement is not only a way to increase brand recall and recognition but also helps build brand image (Cheung et al., 2020). Similarly, Rimadias et al. (2021) reported that the impact of brand engagement on brand loyalty (T value= $26.339 > 1.96$), brand image (T value= $19.899 > 1.96$), and brand awareness (T value= $12.902 > 1.96$) is quite high and meaningful. Brand engagement is viewed as an essential motivation for building beneficial relationships with customers, nurturing loyalty, fostering brand awareness, and fostering brand image (Rimadias et al., 2021). The accepted H5 hypothesis also helps strengthen Rossanty et al. (2024) conclusion about the positive impact of brand engagement on brand equity across three dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty ($\beta=0.306$, $p=0.016$). Cognitive engagement leads consumers to actively contemplate and remember the brand, emotional engagement improves brand loyalty and brand preference, and behavioral engagement drives customer use along with reinforcing perceived quality (Rossanty et al., 2024). In summary, all studies have established significant positive correlations between the cognition, emotion, and behavior components of brand engagement and the key components of brand equity. The R^2 value of brand equity is 0.594, which is equivalent to that reported by Cheung et al. (2020), who reported an R^2 value of 0.57 for brand awareness and 0.647 for brand

image, which is higher than that reported by Rossanty et al. (2024), who reported an R^2 value of 0.395 for brand equity, and lower than that reported by Rimadias et al. (2021), who reported an R^2 value of 0.753 for brand image and 0.759 for brand loyalty, along with a brand awareness value of 0.552. Overall, all the studies suggest that brand engagement well explains the variation in brand equity.

The results also demonstrate the significant indirect effects of all social media marketing elements on brand equity through the intermediary effect of brand engagement. Among these factors, trendiness has the greatest indirect effect ($\beta=0.313$, p value=0.001), followed by brand storytelling ($\beta=0.301$, $p=0.04$) and finally customization and word of mouth at $\beta=0.180$ ($p=0.011$) and $\beta=0.129$ ($p=0.027$), respectively. This result agrees with that of Rossanty et al. (2024), who determined that there is a sequential effect from social media marketing to brand engagement and then to brand equity, with $\beta=0.173$; $p=0.024$. The captivating content of social media marketing prompts consumers to spend more time interacting with brands, thereby increasing cognition, emotion, and behavior related to brand engagement in a profound way and finally fostering brand equity dimensions such as brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand awareness (Rossanty et al., 2024). On the other hand, the results of Cheung et al. (2020) indicate that there are indirect effects of electronic word-of-mouth and trendiness on brand equity, but customization does not have a significant indirect effect on brand equity, with $p>0.05$. According to Cheung et al. (2020), smartphones are standardized and highly involved products, so consumers tend to prefer general information and comprehensive product specifications over personalized information. In the automobile sector, which is costly for Vietnamese consumers, customization is essential to attract their attention. Finally, SIP theory is useful for understanding how brand engagement on e-commerce platforms affects the value of products and services to consumers, similar to what Perera et al. (2020) previously reported. Through the SIP model, the research suggests that car owners' involvement on social media can help them learn about car manufacturers and strengthen their relationships with brands, which builds valuable brand equity.

7. Conclusions and managerial implications

In summary, the importance of social media marketing is undeniable for businesses in general and car manufacturers in particular in the modern digital context. The quantitative analysis method, along with data collected from 562 selective responses from car owners participating in e-commerce platforms, confirms that important parts of social media marketing, including customization, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and brand storytelling, are determinants of brand engagement and brand equity in the automobile market of Vietnam. Customization allows the automaker to interact with and care for customers in a distinctive way on the basis of the exploitation of data and profiles of each individual, which results in satisfaction and emotional attachment to the brand. Trendiness demonstrates the agility and dynamism of the automaker. The automotive industry could form its brand association and brand image as a superior and upscale brand by capturing and updating content on the website, thereby enhancing customers' engagement and brand equity. Word-of-mouth is considered a reliable source of recommendation information that encourages consumers to spend effort and time interacting and engaging more with the brand's social networks. In particular, the study successfully tested the critical role of brand storytelling integrated into social media marketing, which has increased brand engagement and brand equity. Brand storytelling creates consumers' favorable emotions and cognitions and transcends the clutter of promotion strategies to make a strong impression, thus helping consumers remember brands deeply. Through the indirect impact of social media marketing, brand engagement exerts a markedly favorable influence on consumer-based brand equity within Vietnam's vehicle sector. As the level of brand engagement increases, consumers become more emotionally, mentally, and interactively engaged with the brand, thereby strengthening brand recognition, increasing perceived quality and brand loyalty, and nurturing sustainable brand equity.

On the basis of these results, this research discusses future research directions and managerial implications. To implement trendiness, car manufacturers are required to invest their budgets in technology to detect emerging trends in the market early and make the right choices about trends that are relevant to their automakers. Car companies should engage with appropriate digital platforms to deploy and disseminate exciting, timely content. For customization, marketers should develop social media marketing activities that are personalized to individual customers and use a more targeted approach across both traditional media and e-commerce platforms. Accordingly, marketers need to invest their budgets in software or modern technology that collects and analyzes customer profiles, helps businesses understand consumer behavior toward car products and apply personalized marketing strategies. To promote positive word-of-mouth, automakers need to maintain the quality of products and customer service so that customers are willing to share information with family and friends. Then, car manufacturers design e-commerce platforms that are easy to use for optimizing word-of-mouth capabilities. To harness the power of effective storytelling for automobiles, marketers have built story scripts that express the spirit and values of the car brand and are cohesive with the brand image. It needs to evoke emotion, create cohesion, and inspire action in purchasing decisions. To build successful brand engagement and strengthen customer–brand relationships, automobile companies can join and manage online car brand communities on e-commerce platforms that facilitate customer comments and learning about the car brand. This strategy is expected to enhance the engagement between consumers and automobile brands as well as consolidate brand equity.

In addition to these findings, the study has several limitations. The study exclusively concentrates on automobiles. Future research could increase the number of other high-end businesses with luxury products whose brand equity is likely to be highly influenced by brand storytelling and brand engagement. Only four components of social media marketing were examined for the automobile market of Vietnam in the present study; future research could expand to investigate more dimensions of social media marketing. We recommend extending the study's geographical scope to other markets that share similar characteristics with the Vietnamese market. In addition to SIP theory, future research might consider other foundational conceptual frameworks, such as the SOR model or attachment theory. Finally, in addition to the intermediate factor of brand engagement, future research may consider other potential intermediate factors, such as brand experience, brand personality, or brand love.

Ethical considerations

Consent was duly acquired from all participants during the data collection process.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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