



CONSUMER ANTECEDENTS FOR WRITING ONLINE REVIEWS AND THE MEDIATION ROLE OF MESSAGE TRUST WITH BRAND EQUITY OF ONLINE PRODUCTS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the consumer antecedent model for writing online reviews and the mediating role of message trust with brand equity. A through-process study design, in which participants were assigned to brands with stronger or weaker brand equity, measured participants' intention to write reviews. Message trust was measured to study its mediating role. The results confirmed that consumers are more likely to write online reviews when messages come from more substantial equity brands. Message trust mediates the relationship between brand equity and intention to write online reviews. This study augments the brand equity and online review literature by providing evidence that a higher level of consumer confidence in a brand with more substantial equity leads to an increased intention to write reviews for that brand. It also shows that consumer awareness of brand motives is more beneficial for brands with substantial brand equity, contributing to the persuasion knowledge literature.

Keywords: Online Products, Online review writing, Brand equity, Message trust

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

Consumers' dependence on online reviews when making purchasing decisions, the number of online reviews written after receiving brand requests, and understanding the effect of brand equity on online reviews are interesting, current, and relevant phenomena for the company's adaptation strategy. This study investigates whether consumers are more likely to write reviews when demand comes from brands that have higher or lower brand equity. Branding efforts revolve around ensuring that the brand strongly influences potential buyers. It is known that brands with higher brand equity have higher brand loyalty (Pappu and Quester, 2016) and make a premium price (Steenkamp et al., 2010).

The various benefits that brands with higher brand equity enjoy are proven in research. However, little research attention has been paid to the effect of brand equity in persuading consumers to write online reviews. The multiple benefits enjoyed by brands with tangible equity may lead to the idea that higher brand equity can effectively influence consumers to write online product reviews (Muniz et al., 2019). Brand equity ratings vary significantly across ratings, and their ratings also vary from each rank's methodology. While Forbes only focuses on financial performance to calculate the brand value, Brandz and Interbrand consider the financial value and consumer value perspectives. Furthermore,

Previous studies have primarily relied on the consumer perspective to measure brand equity. This study explores how brand equity persuades consumers to write online reviews (Girard et al., 2017). Brands develop strategies focused on how best to serve consumers. Brand equity development requires persistence, dedication, and intelligence to understand and meet consumer expectations. While brand managers can develop substantial brand equity if they demonstrate a difference and ensure consistency over time, building a brand with substantial equity is complex and presents challenges and risks. Brand managers and stakeholders always pursue this goal considering the benefits enjoyed by brands with substantial equity outweigh any risks (Aaker, 2012).

Strong brands with significant equity provide higher customer loyalty to the company, less vulnerability to competitive marketing actions and marketing crises, large margins, better customer response to increases, decreases in price, trade or cooperation, intermediary support more significantly, increased marketing communication effectiveness, better licensing opportunities, and brand extension (Espinosa et al., 2018). In addition, strong brands also enjoy higher brand recognition and brand recall (Krishnan et al., 2013). Thus, previous research emphasized the importance of having a brand name that helps generate easy brand recall and recognition (Lerman and Garbarino, 2002).

Brands with substantial equity have a higher probability of successful brand extension (Chun et al., 2015). Branding is the primary driver of company performance (Yin Wong and Merrilees, 2008). However, previous research does not provide conclusive evidence on whether and how brand equity influences consumers to write reviews for a brand. Online reviews are a significant factor in forming consumer attitudes towards a brand and significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions (Lis and Fischer, 2020). In general, online presence and social media activity benefit brand equity (Lim et al., 2020).

Lee et al. (2008) studied the effect of negative online reviews on brand attitudes and found that negative reviews resulted in incongruence among consumers. Furthermore, negative

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online product reviews have a sizeable detrimental effect on consumer-based brand equity. Negative word of mouth hurts brand equity and provides no insight into whether brand efforts encourage consumers to write positive reviews, creating positive eWOM. Moreover, Cheung and Lee (2012) found that reputation, belonging, and fun help other consumers to motivate people to write online reviews. Brands with more substantial brand equity enjoy higher customer loyalty and increased emotional attachment (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011).

The moderating effect of brand equity in the relationship between online customer reviews concludes that positive or negative online reviews increase or decrease brand equity sales. Floyd et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis concluded that the valence of online reviews was more influential than the volume of online reviews. The relationship between brand equity and online reviews means that consumers are more likely to respond positively to requests for reviews from solid brands. However, less strong brands are not necessarily without loyalty because they can be seen as underdogs, leading to high brand loyalty and consumer purchase intentions (Paharia et al., 2010). However, applying the same level of persuasiveness as a brand with high brand equity may not be possible for an underdog brand.

Christodoulides et al. (2006) argue that brands with more substantial brand equity will enjoy a higher level of emotional connection with consumers. Consumers become more loyal to the brand when conducting online transactions. Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016) also provide evidence of increased consumer intention to engage with stronger brands in online product purchase initiatives. Since asking consumers to write online reviews can be an example of a brand co-creation initiative, consumers may be more likely to respond to the initiative if the request comes from a stronger brand. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that brands with more substantial equity have a more significant influence on attracting consumers to write reviews.

H1. Brand equity affects consumers' intentions to write reviews when consumers receive messages asking to write reviews for a brand.

If brand equity affects consumers' intentions to write reviews when prompted by a brand, it is imperative to understand the underlying reasons behind consumers' differing responses. One potential underlying reason is how trustworthy a message asking for a review is perceived by consumers. Strong brands command higher consumer trust (Berry, 2000), and thus, messages from brands with more substantial brand equity can be perceived as more trustworthy. The following section discusses message trust's mediating role in writing online reviews.

The continuity of the message depends on how trustworthy. If consumers perceive a message to be trustworthy, then the message can motivate consumers to act as expected by the brand. A message is perceived truth or trustworthiness determines how consumers will react to the message. Message trust equals source credibility (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). Source credibility is commonly used to imply the communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of the message (Ohanian, 1990). Studying the effect of message credibility on brand attitudes and finding that reliability is an essential component of message credibility (Wu and Wang, 2011).

Reliability reflects the amount of trust and acceptance that the receiver of a message has in the sender. Messages from stronger brands are perceived as more trustworthy. The relationship between WOM and brand equity finds that if a brand has equity, consumer confidence in the WOM message is higher if the message is positive and lower if the message is negative. Consumers perceive positive WOM as more trustworthy when the message is

associated with a stronger brand. Marshall and WoonBong (2003) further argue that messages from strong brands are perceived as more trustworthy vs. messages from weaker brands, regardless of whether the messages are sent via the internet or print media. However, the effect of trust on consumers' willingness to write reviews has not been studied before.

Sichtmann (2007) studied the effect of trust on purchase intention and concluded that if consumers trust a brand, the purchase intention will be higher. Moreover, Grewal et al. (1994) show that consumers' perceptions of product performance risk are lower when a brand's message is trustworthy. Since brand messages with more substantial brand equity are perceived as more trustworthy, and brand equity has a more substantial effect on the trustworthiness of WOM messages (Marshall and WoonBong, 2003), it is thus argued that messages from brands with more substantial equity prompt consumers to write reviews for that brand will be considered more trustworthy.

H2. Messages asking to write online reviews from brands with higher brand equity are more trustworthy.

Furthermore, while it is clear that the higher the brand equity, the higher the likelihood that consumers will respond positively to a brand's request to write a review, given consumers' natural skepticism of a company's message, this study suggests that trust in a company's message mediates the relationship between brand equity and reviews, online. Thus, given the increasing number of positive responses, consumers show messages that more powerful brands can trust.

H3. Message trust mediates the relationship between brand equity and online reviews.

This paper aims to test whether there is a relationship between brand equity and online reviews. It also examines whether messages from brands with more substantial equity are perceived as more trustworthy and how different consumers respond to requests to write online reviews when those requests come from brands with stronger vs. weaker brand equity. The mediating role of message trust was also tested. A pre-test was conducted to test the research hypothesis. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework model.

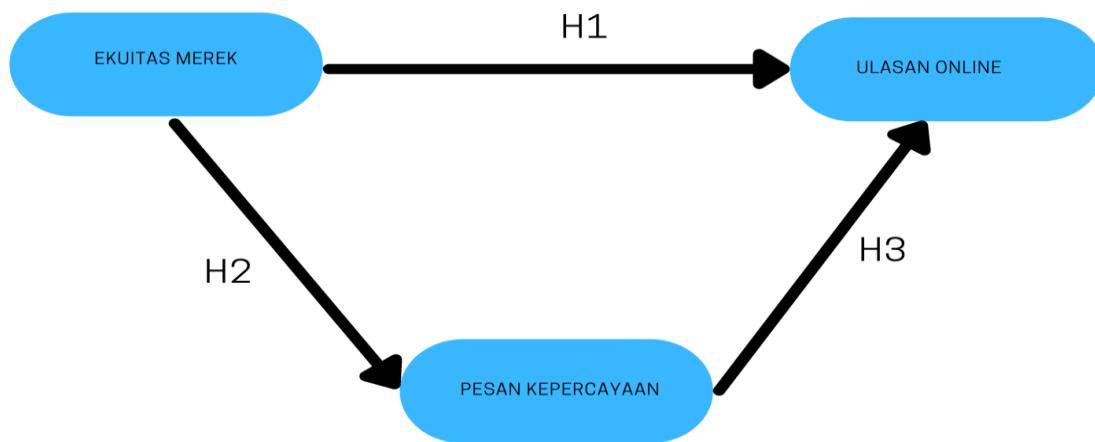


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Model

Results

The research was conducted using an online survey distributed to the target respondents. Data screening is carried out to detect respondents who have problems. According to Hair (2019), detection of respondent data needs to be done to avoid response bias, for example, respondents

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who fill in the origin or respondents who fill in a particular pattern. The total data after the screening process were 260 respondents who met the requirements. Respondent profile data can be seen in the following table:

Table 1 Characteristics of Respondents

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Description	Information	Percentage
Gender	Man	42.66%
	Woman	57.34%
Age	>17 - 25 years old	33.9%
	> 25 - 30 Years	30.9%
	> 30 - 35 Years	23.5%
	> 35 Years	11.8%
Level of education	senior High School	42.1%
	S1	41.6%
	S2	11.4%
	S3	4.9%
Income	< 1,000,000	30.4%
	>1,000,000 - 2,500,000	19.1%
	> 2,500,000 - 5,000,000	22.5%
	> 5,000,000 - 7,500,000	14.2%
	> 7,500,000	12.8%

Source: Data processed 2021

From the table, it can be seen that, based on gender criteria, most of the respondents are female, with a percentage of 57.34%. Male with a percentage of 42.66%. Based on the Age criteria, most of the respondents were aged >17-25 years with a percentage of 32.4%, followed by respondents aged between>25-30 years with a presentation of 30.9%. Based on the Education Level criteria, most of the respondents have a high school education level with 42.1%, followed by respondents having an undergraduate education level with a presentation of 41.6%. Based on the income criteria, most respondents have income < 1,000,000 with 30.4%.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Data analysis was carried out using PLS-SEM through SMART PLS software Version 3.3.2. The testing process is carried out in 3 stages: internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The internal consistency reliability test results were carried out using Cronbach alpha. From the data analysis performed, the results are shown in the following table:

Table 2 Testing Internal Consistency Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Test result
Preferences	0.874	Very good
Quality	0.932	Very good
Sustainability	0.857	Very good
Trust of Message	0.931	Very good
Intention to Write Review	0.885	Very good

Source: Data processed 2021

The test results in the table above show a reliability value above 0.7. Hair (2017) states that a Cronbach alpha score above 0.7 is excellent. Thus, overall, all variables pass the internal

consistency reliability test. Convergent validity testing is done by looking at the value of Indicator Reliability (Outer Loading) and the value of AVE (Average Variance Extracted). Hair (2017) states that the standard outer loading value is outstanding if a score above 0.7 and the standard AVE value above 0.5 has perfect criteria. The results of convergent validity testing can be seen in the following table:

Table 3. Convergent Validity Test

Construct	Indicator	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Status
Preferences	P1	0.834	0.914	0.725	Very good
	P2	0.877			
	P3	0.846			
	P4	0.85			
Quality	Q1	0.712	0.943	0.648	Very good
	Q2	0.817			
	Q3	0.751			
	Q4	0.801			
	Q5	0.831			
	Q6	0.813			
	Q7	0.884			
	Q8	0.819			
	Q9	0.806			
Sustainability	S1	0.819	0.903	0.699	Very good
	S2	0.85			
	S3	0.847			
	S4	0.829			
Trust of Message	TM1	0.715	0.942	0.645	Very good
	TM2	0.795			
	TM3	0.824			
	TM4	0.817			
	TM5	0.857			
	TM6	0.827			
	TM7	0.838			
	TM8	0.791			
	TM9	0.754			
Intention to Write Review	IWR1	0.806	0.916	0.685	Very good
	IWR2	0.839			
	IWR3	0.839			
	IWR4	0.879			
	IWR5	0.772			

Source: Data processed 2021

The results of the convergent validity test in the table above show that the outer loading value is above 0.7, and the AVE value is above 0.5. So it can be concluded that each variable and its

indicators have excellent convergent validity. The discriminant validity test used the Fornell-Larcker criteria (Hair 2017). The value of cross-loading loading is expected to have the highest value for that variable. The results of discriminant validity testing can be seen in the following table:

Table. Discriminant Validity Test

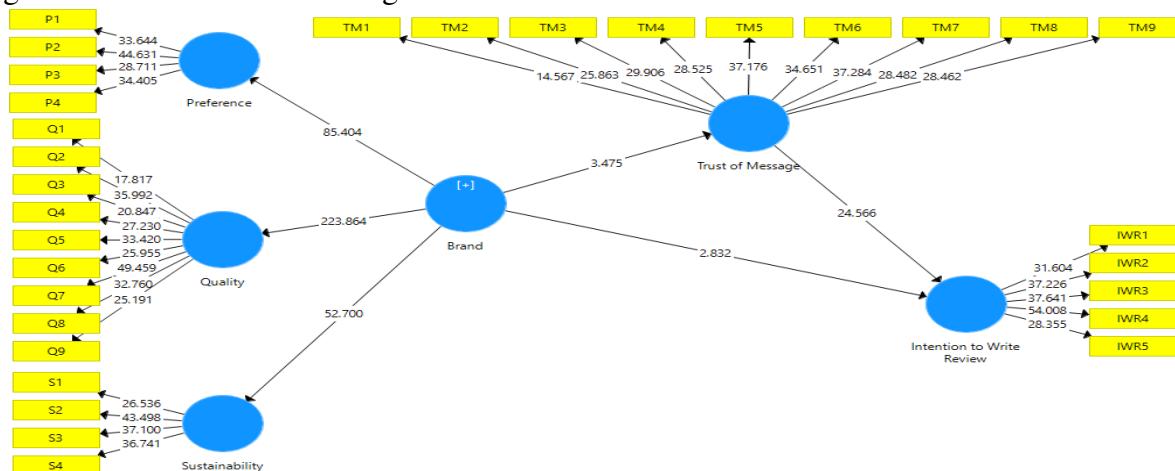
Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Status
Brand	0.779						fulfilled
Intention to Write Review	0.258	0.828					fulfilled
Preferences	0.923	0.243	0.852				fulfilled
Quality	0.974	0.258	0.851	0.805			fulfilled
Sustainability	0.907	0.211	0.788	0.826	0.836		fulfilled
Trust of Message	0.199	0.814	0.197	0.204	0.144	0.803	fulfilled

The results of the discriminant validity test showed that each variable met the Fornell-Larcker criteria because it had the highest correlation score compared to other correlations.

Structural Model Evaluation

After evaluating the measurement model, the next step is to analyze the structural model to test the previously proposed hypothesis. This analysis was conducted by testing the direct or indirect effect between the hypothesized variables. The following are the results of the PLS-SEM analysis:

Figure. Structural Model Testing



Source: SMART PLS Visual Output from data processing

The results of complete hypothesis testing can be seen in the following table:

Table. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Standard Deviation	T test	P Values	Information
Brand → Intention to Write Review	0.035	2.832	0.005	Significant
Brand → Trust of Message	0.057	3.475	0.001	Significant
Trust of Message → Intention to Write Review	0.032	24.566	0.000	Significant



Source: Data processed 2021

The results of testing the hypothesis that examine the influence of Brand on Intention to Write Review obtained a t-test test value of 2.832 with a p-value of 0.005. Using a 95% confidence level, the standard used for the t value is 1.96. Because the t-test value is more significant than 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, it can be concluded that the hypothesis is accepted. The brand has a positive effect on Intention to Write Review.

The results of hypothesis testing that examine the influence of Brand on Trust of Message obtained a t-test test value of 3,475 with a p-value of 0.001. Using a 95% confidence level, the standard used for the t value is 1.96. Because the t-test value is more significant than 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, it can be concluded that the hypothesis is accepted. The brand has a positive effect on Trust of Message.

The results of hypothesis testing that examine the effect of Trust of Message on Intention to Write Review obtained a t-test test value of 24,566 with a p-value of 0.001. Using a 95% confidence level, the standard used for the t value is 1.96. Because the t-test value is more significant than 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, it can be concluded that the hypothesis is accepted. Trust of Message has a positive effect on Intention to Write Review.

PLS-SEM analysis showed that brand equity was a statistically significant predictor of participants' intention to write online reviews supporting Hypothesis H1. Since brand equity consists of three constructs – loyalty, quality, and awareness – the individual effects of these constructs on intention to write reviews are examined. The results showed that loyalty, rather than quality and awareness, was a statistically significant predictor of participants' intention to write online reviews. The PLS-SEM analysis also showed that brand equity was a statistically significant predictor of participants' trust in the message, Supporting Hypothesis H2. Furthermore, message trust and intention to write online reviews as dependent variables.

As noted earlier, participants were asked how much they trusted read messages from their respective brands, assuming that participants who had higher trust in those messages were more likely to write reviews for that brand. To test this hypothesis, perform a mediation analysis using SEM PLS. The results show that the effect of brand equity on trust in the message is statistically significant, thus supporting Hypothesis H2, and the effect of message trust (the mediator variable) on the intention to write a review is also statistically significant. The direct effect of brand equity on intention to write a review is also statistically significant. However, bootstrap analysis confirmed an indirect effect of 0.46 with 95% CI correction bias. Therefore.

Discussion

With the growth of online sales and with brands recognizing the value of online customer reviews, the need for positive online reviews is increasing. Brand equity can be increased with a steady stream of positive online reviews, and brands with substantial equity enjoy various benefits. The results of the three studies clearly show that brands that have higher brand equity are more likely to persuade consumers to write reviews for them. The results also show that consumer confidence in a message is high when the message comes from a brand with more substantial equity and higher trust leads to a more positive response to requests to write reviews for a brand.

In other words, the capacity of brands with more substantial equity to persuade consumers to write online reviews can lead to more positive online reviews, which will lead to

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higher levels of brand equity, resulting in a virtuous cycle for the brand; proves the growing importance of positive online reviews for a brand. The message used in the manipulation simply states that the requested review will help other consumers. It did not mention the possible benefits for the brand. Furthermore, the potential trust implications for neither low equity nor high equity brands are mentioned or manipulated. As such, this study fails to provide specific recommendations for brands with weaker equity on what strategies they can adopt to ensure that consumers respond to their review requests. Furthermore, the research findings also show that consumer confidence in brand messages with weaker equity is lower.

A possible reason behind this finding is that the manipulated messages only address the benefits of the review to other consumers and not to the brand. Thus, the message may not be sufficient to generate higher levels of trust for brands with weaker equity. A potential solution could be for brands with weaker equity to also include in their messages the benefits they would enjoy from consumers writing reviews for them. Explaining two-way benefits arguably results in more vital trust and maybe a more effective way of persuading consumers to write reviews for brands with weaker equity.

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it contributes to the existing branding literature by providing evidence that the higher the brand equity, the higher the likelihood that consumers will respond positively to requests to write online reviews. Previous literature has not studied the persuasive ability of brands to encourage consumers to write online reviews. Second, it contributes to the existing literature on brand trust and messages as it provides evidence that consumers have higher trust in messages emanating from brands with higher brand equity. This study provides evidence of a positive linear relationship between brand equity and message trust. Third, expand the theory of knowledge of persuasion in the area of brand equity.

Based on Isaac and Grayson's (2017) finding that access to persuasion knowledge leads to more credibility, this study examines and finds support for the assumption that access to persuasion knowledge moderates the relationship between brand equity and consumer intention to write online reviews. This finding also shows that access to persuasion knowledge has greater persuasive power when the message comes from a higher brand equity brand. This study also makes several managerial contributions. Given that consumers are more likely to write reviews for brands they perceive as having higher brand equity, the importance of building a solid brand is amplified and serves as a reminder for companies to focus on their branding efforts. When looking for reviews online, Brand managers should not hesitate to email consumers making specific requests to write reviews for their brands. The findings of this study provide evidence that consumers will respond positively to these requests. However, brands also need to remember that the likelihood of receiving a positive review depends on how trustworthy the message is perceived to be. Therefore, brands need to build trust in the minds of consumers by crafting a message, which is genuine and expresses the purpose of the brand. Brands also need to remember that the likelihood of receiving a positive review depends on how trustworthy the message is perceived to be. Therefore, brands need to build trust in the minds of consumers by crafting a message, which is genuine and expresses the purpose of the brand. Brands also need to remember that the likelihood of receiving a positive review depends on how trustworthy the message is perceived to be. Therefore, brands need to build trust in the minds of consumers by crafting a message, which is genuine and expresses the purpose of the brand.



Although this study provides evidence that brand equity and intention to write online reviews are positively correlated, and trust in messages is an essential mediator in this relationship, it does not address other issues that could be explored by future research. First, participants in all three studies were located only in the United States. The brands analyzed are global, and their relative brand equity may vary across countries. For example, while Apple is the dominant brand in the US, Huawei may be perceived as the more powerful brand in Asia. Thus, future studies may focus on testing this relationship in different countries. Second, customer satisfaction may be a significant issue in the relationship between brand equity and online reviews. Even if the message comes from a brand with higher brand equity, if the customer is not satisfied, the customer should not write a review or perhaps write a negative one. Future studies should address the effect of customer satisfaction on intentions to write online reviews. Third, since the original brand was used in the experimental study, other confounding factors such as brand love, brand coolness, or brand nostalgia could influence consumers' intentions to write reviews. However, random assignment of subjects would likely minimize those concerns (there are other possible confounding factors). Such as brand love, brand coolness, or brand nostalgia can influence consumers' intentions to write reviews.

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