

## **FROM SCROLL TO SALE: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING BUILDS CUSTOMER EQUITY THROUGH BRAND EXPERIENCE AT CREAMSIE WHIMSIE**

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### **ABSTRAK**

*This study aims to analyze the influence of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs) on Customer Equity, with Brand Experience as a mediating variable among consumers of the premium vape product Creamsie Whimsie in Indonesia. The research method used is a quantitative explanatory approach with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis technique through SmartPLS 4, based on data obtained from 150 social media user respondents. The results show that SMMAs have a significant effect on Brand Experience and Customer Equity, and Brand Experience is proven to mediate the relationship between SMMAs and Customer Equity. The conclusion of this study confirms that an effective social media marketing strategy can build a strong brand experience and positively impact customer value in the context of the niche market for experience-based FMCG products.*

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Brand Experience, Customer Equity, Premium Vape, PLS-SEM

### **INTRODUCTION**

The emergence of social media as a dominant communication platform has radically transformed marketing paradigms, enabling brands to engage directly with consumers and foster relational value through digital interactions. Social media marketing activities (SMMAs)—such as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth—play a vital role in influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors, particularly by enhancing brand visibility and engagement (Hubner et al., 2024; Kim & Ko, 2012). These dimensions have been shown to correlate strongly with constructs like brand loyalty, brand trust, and ultimately customer equity (Hafez, 2021; Yu & Yuan, 2019). However, while much of the literature has emphasized sectors like fashion and cosmetics, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these mechanisms function within niche and sensitive product categories such as premium vape liquids. Customer equity theory (Zeithaml et al., 2001) provides a foundational framework to evaluate how marketing efforts translate into long-term customer value. It disaggregates equity into value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity—each reflecting economic, psychological, and relational contributions to consumer decision-making. In tandem, brand experience theory (Brakus et al., 2009) posits that consumer interaction with a brand across sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral dimensions leads to meaningful brand relationships. The synergy between SMMAs and these experiences, particularly in digital environments, presents an area ripe for empirical exploration (Cheung et al., 2020; Safeer et al., 2020). Notably, SMMAs create interactive, customized, and emotionally engaging brand relationships that can enhance brand equity and shape consumer response (Bernardus et al., 2024).



**Figure 1.** A range of Creamsie Whimsie variants

In Indonesia's increasingly digitized marketplace, the premium vape industry presents a unique setting for such research due to its niche market dynamics, regulatory scrutiny, and experiential product orientation. *Creamsie Whimsie*, an e-liquid brand within this segment, has adopted social media extensively, yet the tangible impact of its efforts on customer equity and how brand experience mediates this relationship remains understudied. This study positions itself within this niche, aiming to contribute both theoretically and managerially to the understanding of digital marketing efficacy in specialized FMCG domains. Despite the proliferation of social media marketing, there is limited empirical investigation into how SMMA specifically influence customer equity in the premium vape industry. While previous studies have validated the impact of social media strategies on customer-based brand equity (Evelina, 2023), they often neglect nuanced product categories where customer engagement is shaped by both regulation and lifestyle branding. For a niche brand like *Creamsie Whimsie*, understanding how different dimensions of SMMA contribute to equity-building—especially when mediated by brand experience—is both a theoretical and practical imperative. The general solution proposed in this research is to empirically examine the linkages among SMMA, brand experience, and customer equity using structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

This approach not only enables robust testing of complex relationships, including mediation effects, but also aligns with the nature of marketing constructs that are often reflective and latent in nature (J. F. Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2021). By focusing on Indonesian vape consumers active on social media, the study offers context-specific insights while contributing to broader discussions on experiential branding in digital environments. The literature on social media marketing underscores its capability to foster consumer engagement through multidimensional activities. Kim and Ko (2012) introduced a robust conceptualization of SMMA encompassing entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth—all of which have shown significant effects on consumer decision-making and brand-related outcomes. For instance, entertaining and trendy content has been linked to higher brand recall and loyalty (Adiningtyas & Hasanah, 2023), while interactive and customized content fosters deeper relational bonds and trust (Koay et al., 2020; Zanjabila et al., 2023). Complementing this, brand experience theory as it is stated by Brakus et al. (2009) highlights how experiential stimuli shape brand attitudes and loyalty. Sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral experiences are found to significantly mediate the relationship between marketing stimuli and consumer outcomes, including brand attachment, advocacy, and equity (Liu & Yan, 2022; Safeer et al., 2020).

Recent studies emphasize that consumers exposed to immersive brand experiences on platforms like Instagram and TikTok are more likely to form enduring emotional bonds with

brands (Farhat et al., 2020). Customer equity theory as it is stated by Zeithaml et al. (2001) offers a structured lens to evaluate the outcomes of these experiences. It suggests that value, brand, and relationship equity collectively determine customer lifetime value. Research by Gao and Choy (2019) and Kwon & Ahn (2022) supports this notion by linking brand experiences to enhanced brand equity and loyalty. This study integrates these frameworks to test a mediation model where brand experience serves as the conduit through which SMMA influences customer equity. Although extensive research has validated the role of SMMA in sectors like fashion and cosmetics (Hafez, 2021; Yu & Yuan, 2019), there is a conspicuous lack of empirical studies addressing niche FMCG products such as vape liquids. These products are characterized by unique experiential consumption and often involve tightly-knit online communities that influence purchasing behavior through peer recommendations and user-generated content (Nobi et al., 2021).

The lack of studies in this domain presents a critical research gap. Moreover, while some studies have examined the role of brand experience in mediating marketing outcomes (Farhat et al., 2020; Liu & Yan, 2022), few have tested this mediation within an SEM framework focused on customer equity as the primary dependent variable. Particularly in the Indonesian context, where local branding and community-based marketing are prevalent, this presents a significant omission in current research. The integration of higher-order constructs such as customer equity and brand experience within a unified PLS-SEM framework remains underexplored in existing literature. Many studies isolate constructs or limit their models to linear pathways without examining deeper interaction and mediation effects. This study addresses this methodological gap by employing a hierarchical component model to represent these abstract constructs more accurately, aligning with current best practices in SEM modeling (J. Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2021).

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the influence of social media marketing activities (SMMA) on customer equity, with brand experience serving as a mediating variable. Specifically, the study aims to (1) assess the direct impact of SMMA on customer equity, (2) evaluate the mediating role of brand experience, and (3) offer strategic recommendations to niche brands like *Creamsie Whimsie* on how to optimize digital engagement to maximize customer value. This study introduces a novel context—the Indonesian premium vape liquid market—into the broader discourse on SMMA and customer equity. It distinguishes itself by focusing on a niche product category characterized by experiential consumption and strong community dynamics. Furthermore, the research advances methodological rigor through the use of PLS-SEM for hierarchical constructs, contributing both theoretically and empirically to the literature on digital brand management.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)*

Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) are strategic brand communications delivered via social networking platforms to influence consumer behavior. According to Kim and Ko (2012), SMMA encompass five critical components: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth (WoM). These dimensions collectively stimulate engagement, foster brand associations, and shape customer decisions. Entertainment enhances user engagement through enjoyable and emotionally resonant content. As highlighted by Hubner et al. (2024), entertaining brand content significantly increases brand recall and affinity. Interaction, on the other hand, creates a bidirectional communication channel, allowing consumers to engage in dialogue with brands (Koay et al., 2020), thereby fostering trust and relational bonds (Zanjabila et al., 2023). Trendiness emphasizes temporal relevance, allowing brands to align with cultural and social movements, thus boosting shareability and consumer interest (Purwaningwulan, 2021). Customization

tailors brand content to individual preferences, increasing relevance and emotional connectivity (H. D. Putra et al., 2023). Lastly, WoM harnesses peer influence via social proof and user advocacy, recognized as a highly credible source for brand evaluation (Arianty & Julita, 2019). Collectively, these dimensions position SMMAAs as powerful antecedents of experiential and equity outcomes, especially within digital consumption contexts.

### ***Brand Experience***

Brand experience refers to the subjective, internal consumer responses evoked by brand-related stimuli, encompassing sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral dimensions (Brakus et al., 2009). Sensory experiences arise from stimuli that engage the five senses (Aditya & Tamonsang, 2023). Affective responses include emotional reactions, such as joy or nostalgia, often linked to storytelling or shared values (Banerjee, 2024). Intellectual experience stimulates cognitive engagement, encouraging consumers to think creatively or learn about the brand (Almohaimmed, 2020). Behavioral experience encompasses customer actions, including repeat purchases or online interactions (Sukawati, 2021). Brand experience is integral in forming brand attachment, influencing brand love, loyalty, and advocacy (Farhat et al., 2020; Liu & Yan, 2022). Particularly within experiential product categories such as vape liquids, the brand experience bridges abstract digital engagement with concrete consumer loyalty outcomes.

### ***Customer Equity***

Customer equity encapsulates the total combined value of a company's customer base and is often conceptualized in three components: value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity (Zeithaml et al., 2001). Value equity reflects the customer's assessment of the product's quality relative to its cost (F. K. K. Putra & Law, 2023). Brand equity refers to the added value derived from brand awareness, loyalty, and associations (Gao & Choy, 2019). It has been found to buffer negative online reviews and drive purchase intentions (Piehler et al., 2019). Relationship equity denotes the emotional and trust-based connections that drive repeat purchases and enhance lifetime customer value (Akhtar & Ali, 2019; Kwon & Ahn, 2022). These components are mutually reinforcing and are influenced by both direct brand communication and the quality of experiences delivered through digital channels. Social media, by facilitating direct engagement and narrative storytelling, can directly and indirectly influence all three equity dimensions (Farzin et al., 2021; Kusumasondjaja & Tjiptono, 2019).

### ***Mediating Role of Brand Experience***

Empirical research suggests that brand experience mediates the relationship between SMMAAs and consumer-based brand outcomes (Hafez, 2021; Safeer et al., 2020). Emotional and intellectual brand experiences, in particular, are shown to convert digital engagement into brand loyalty and advocacy (Liu & Yan, 2022). The mediation effect is especially salient in lifestyle and experience-centric markets, where emotional and sensory triggers are central to consumer decision-making (Farhat et al., 2020; Rauschnabel, 2024). Within the premium vape industry, social media offers an immersive environment where sensory cues (e.g., imagery, flavors), emotional narratives, and interactive content converge to shape brand experience. This brand experience, in turn, is posited to influence how customers perceive and assess value, brand identity, and relational quality.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed an explanatory quantitative design to examine the influence of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAAs) on customer equity, mediated by brand experience, within the Indonesian premium vape industry. Utilizing a non-probability purposive sampling method, data were collected from 150 social media users familiar with

the *Creamsie Whimsie* brand through a structured online questionnaire. Measurement instruments were adapted from SMMAAs, Brand Experience, and Customer Equity, with all constructs measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The research adopted a deductive approach and was implemented in sequential stages—conceptual modeling, survey distribution, data screening, and analysis. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4, enabling the evaluation of complex mediation effects involving hierarchical component models (J. Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2021). Model assessment followed a two-step approach, analyzing both the measurement and structural models. Reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were confirmed through outer loadings, AVE, composite reliability, and HTMT ratios, while path coefficients and mediation effects were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. The final results were visualized using SmartPLS outputs, providing empirical support for the hypothesized relationships and yielding strategic insights for niche experiential brands.

## RESEARCH AND SERVICE RESULTS

The demographic profile strongly supports the study's objective of examining the influence of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAAs) on brand experience and customer equity in the premium vape industry. The sample is gender-balanced (75 males, 75 females) and predominantly composed of young adults aged 18–30 (127 respondents), which aligns with the digital-native consumer segment most responsive to social media marketing (Kim & Ko, 2012). Educationally, a significant portion holds a Bachelor's degree (86 respondents), indicating a well-informed audience capable of engaging with experiential and intellectual brand stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009). Occupations such as freelancers, entrepreneurs, and students dominate the sample, representing an economically active and lifestyle-conscious group—a fitting target for experiential FMCG branding (Farhat et al., 2020).

**Table 1.**  
**Respondent Demographic Characteristics**

Category	Label	Count
Gender	Male	75
	Female	75
Age Group	18-24	65
	25-30	62
	31-35	23
Education	Bachelor	86
	Diploma	31
	Master	21
	High School	12
Occupation	Freelancer	42
	Entrepreneur	41
	Student	37
	Employee	30
Instagram Usage Frequency	Frequently	64
	Occasionally	36
	Very Frequently	35
	Rarely	15

In terms of digital behavior, Instagram usage is high, with 99 respondents using the platform frequently or very frequently, affirming their active presence in the digital environment where SMMAAs are deployed. This justifies the use of SmartPLS-SEM to

analyze digital interactions and hierarchical latent constructs (J. F. Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2021). Overall, the demographic characteristics reflect a relevant and context-appropriate sample for evaluating how SMMA shape brand experience and customer equity, especially in a niche market like premium vape liquids where consumer engagement is heavily driven by online and community-based interactions.

### **Measurement Models**

The measurement model evaluation demonstrates strong psychometric properties across all three latent constructs: Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), Brand Experience, and Customer Equity. All indicator loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (J. F. Hair et al., 2019), confirming satisfactory indicator reliability. SMMA indicators load between 0.735 and 0.826, Brand Experience indicators between 0.798 and 0.902, and Customer Equity indicators between 0.771 and 0.913. This indicates that each item effectively captures its intended latent variable. Furthermore, internal consistency reliability is confirmed, as Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs exceed the 0.70 threshold—SMMA (0.84), Brand Experience (0.87), and Customer Equity (0.84)—in accordance with Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) recommendation (Thorndike, 1995).

**Table 2.**  
**Measurement Model**

Variables - Indicators	Loading	$\alpha$	$\rho_A$	CR	AVE
SMMA		0.84	0.85	0.89	0.61
Entertaining brand content	0.808				
Interaction with the brand	0.802				
Trendy and up-to-date content	0.826				
Personalized social media experience	0.745				
Willingness to share brand content online	0.735				
Brand Experience		0.87	0.87	0.91	0.72
Visually Appealing Brand Content	0.798				
Emotional Connection With The Brand	0.902				
Mental Stimulation From The Brand	0.858				
Action-Driven Response To The Brand	0.822				
Customer Equity		0.84	0.88	0.9	0.76
Perceived value for money	0.913				
Positive brand image	0.913				
Commitment to brand relationship	0.771				

Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs also meet the accepted standard of >0.70, with SMMA at 0.89, Brand Experience at 0.91, and Customer Equity at 0.90, further validating the constructs' internal reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Additionally, convergent validity is established through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of 0.614 for SMMA, 0.716 for Brand Experience, and 0.755 for Customer Equity—all above the minimum requirement of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The  $\rho_A$  coefficients, used as a more accurate indicator of construct reliability (Henseler et al., 2015), also meet the 0.70 threshold for all constructs. These results confirm that the measurement model meets all necessary validity and reliability conditions and is therefore suitable for proceeding to structural model evaluation using SmartPLS.

The assessment of discriminant validity, using both the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, confirms that the constructs in the model—Social

Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), Brand Experience, and Customer Equity—are empirically distinct. All HTMT values fall below the conservative threshold of 0.85, as recommended by Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015), with Brand Experience and Customer Equity at 0.539, Brand Experience and SMMA at 0.694, and SMMA and Customer Equity at 0.513. These results indicate that each construct exhibits stronger correlations with its own indicators than with those of other constructs, thereby validating the absence of multicollinearity or conceptual overlap.

**Table 3.**  
**Discriminant Validity**

	Variable	Brand Experience	Customer Equity	SMMA
Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	Brand Experience			
	Customer Equity	0.539		
	SMMA	0.694	0.513	
Fornell-Larcker Criterion	Brand Experience	0.846		
	Customer Equity	0.471	0.869	
	SMMA	0.594	0.446	0.784

Similarly, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion supports discriminant validity by showing that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Specifically, the diagonal AVE square roots—0.846 for Brand Experience, 0.869 for Customer Equity, and 0.784 for SMMA—are greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, such as 0.594 between SMMA and Brand Experience and 0.446 between SMMA and Customer Equity. These findings collectively confirm that the measurement model demonstrates robust discriminant validity, allowing for confident interpretation of the structural relationships among constructs in the subsequent analysis.

### **Structural Models**

The results of the structural model assessment demonstrate that all hypothesized relationships are statistically supported and meet the recommended thresholds for reliability and predictive accuracy. First, the direct effect of Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) on Customer Equity (CE) is significant ( $\beta = 0.256$ ,  $t = 2.96$ ), with a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1.546—well below the critical value of 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2021). Therefore, H1 is accepted. The  $R^2$  value for CE is 0.264, suggesting that SMMA and Brand Experience (BE) jointly explain 26.4% of the variance in Customer Equity. The  $Q^2$  value for CE (0.188) exceeds the threshold of 0, indicating sufficient predictive relevance (J. Hair et al., 2019). The effect size ( $f^2$ ) of SMMA on CE is 0.058, categorized as a small effect according to Cohen (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 4.**  
**Results of Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing**

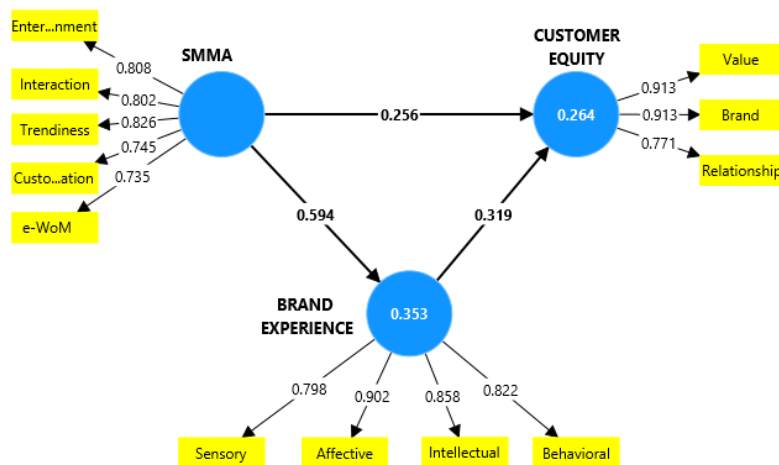
Relationships	$\beta$	$T$ value	VIF	$R^2$	$R^2$ Adjusted	$Q^2$	$f^2$
SMMA -> CE	0.256	2.96	1.546	0.264	0.254	0.188	0.058
SMMA -> BE	0.594	10.962	1.000	0.353	0.349	0.245	0.546
BE -> CE	0.319	3.792	1.546	0.264	0.254	0.188	0.089

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SMMA -> BE -> CE	0.19	3.398
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In terms of the path from SMMA to BE, the relationship is highly significant ( $\beta = 0.594$ ,  $t = 10.962$ ) and reflects a large effect size ( $f^2 = 0.546$ ). The  $R^2$  for BE is 0.353, indicating that SMMA explains 35.3% of the variance in Brand Experience. The predictive relevance is also strong ( $Q^2 = 0.245$ ). Thus, H2 is accepted. Furthermore, BE significantly influences CE ( $\beta = 0.319$ ,  $t = 3.792$ ) with a small-to-moderate effect size ( $f^2 = 0.089$ ), suggesting that Brand Experience contributes meaningfully to customer equity outcomes. Consequently, H3 is accepted. Finally, the mediation pathway from SMMA through Brand Experience to Customer Equity is statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t = 3.398$ ), confirming the mediating role of Brand Experience. Accordingly, H4 is accepted. Collectively, these findings affirm that SMMA positively affects both Brand Experience and Customer Equity directly and indirectly, providing robust support for the proposed research model and its theoretical underpinnings.



**Figure 2.** Final Structural Model with Standardized Loadings, Path Coefficients, and  $R^2$  Values

Based on the SmartPLS analysis, the integration of theoretical frameworks with empirical findings demonstrates a strong alignment between Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAs), Brand Experience, and Customer Equity. The analysis confirms that SMMAs significantly influence both brand experience and customer equity, validating key assumptions in marketing literature. The theoretical framework, rooted in customer equity theory and brand experience theory, finds robust empirical support in the data, illustrating that well-designed social media strategies serve as a vital mechanism for enhancing brand engagement and long-term customer value (Piehler et al., 2019; F. K. K. Putra & Law, 2023). The direct influence of SMMAs on Customer Equity is significant ( $\beta = 0.256$ ,  $t = 2.96$ ), confirming the theory that social media marketing shapes consumer value perceptions, brand attitudes, and relational bonds. This supports prior research suggesting that value equity is elevated through competitive offerings and clear communication, brand equity is shaped by emotional associations and brand image, and relationship equity is strengthened through interaction and engagement (Farzin et al., 2021; Hafez, 2021). The empirical  $R^2$  value of 0.264 for Customer Equity implies that SMMAs meaningfully explain how consumers perceive long-term brand value, reinforcing the necessity for digital marketing strategies that combine informative, affective, and community-driven content.

The strong effect of SMMAs on Brand Experience ( $\beta = 0.594$ ,  $t = 10.962$ ,  $f^2 = 0.546$ ) further reinforces Brand Experience Theory, particularly the four experiential dimensions outlined by Brakus et al. (2009): sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. This



connection highlights how social media elements—such as entertainment, customization, and interactivity—directly evoke emotional and cognitive reactions from consumers (Aditya & Tamonsang, 2023; Koay et al., 2021). The theory is supported by findings from Safeer et al. (2020) and Farhat et al. (2020), who emphasize the role of immersive digital touchpoints in enhancing brand engagement. Thus, SMMAAs are not merely communication tools but experiential platforms that drive deeper brand connection and loyalty. Moreover, Brand Experience plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between SMMAAs and Customer Equity. The mediation pathway ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t = 3.398$ ) supports theoretical models asserting that emotionally rich and cognitively stimulating brand experiences serve as conduits to equity-building outcomes (Chen et al., 2020; Kwon & Ahn, 2022). The relationship confirms that brand experience enhances consumer perceptions of trust, loyalty, and perceived value, linking directly to the constructs of value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity. These findings are consistent with Hafez (2021) and Liu & Yan (2022), who argue that experiential branding strategies significantly influence consumer-based brand equity (CBBE). Thus, this research strengthens theoretical claims by providing empirical evidence of how SMMAAs, mediated by brand experience, shape the broader construct of customer equity.

## CONCLUSION

The present study confirms that Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMAAs) significantly enhance both Brand Experience and Customer Equity. SMMAA exerts a direct influence on customer equity and an indirect influence through brand experience, thereby affirming its mediating role. These findings support and extend extant theories, including Brand Experience Theory and Customer Equity Theory, particularly in the digital marketing context of the premium vape industry. The research makes theoretical and methodological contributions by applying SmartPLS-SEM to a digital-native market, thereby ensuring strong validity and reliability across constructs. This underscores the significance of experiential marketing in fostering long-term customer relationships. Future research endeavors should encompass a more extensive sample size, incorporating novel variables such as brand trust or brand love. Additionally, cross-industry and cross-cultural comparisons should be conducted to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal approaches are also recommended to track evolving brand experiences and equity over time.

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