

Brand Experience and Identification Impact on Loyalty Via Brand Love Among Gen Z iPhone Users

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Abstract

The advancement of technology has contributed to the increasing trend of second-hand iPhone usage among Gen Z (Gen Z), especially in Malang City. This study aims to examine the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between brand experience and consumer brand identification on brand loyalty. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method with 190 Gen Z respondents who use second-hand iPhones, selected through purposive sampling. The research focuses on understanding the emotional and psychological factors that influence consumers' attachment and loyalty toward brands, even in the context of used products. The findings reveal that brand experience and consumer brand identification have a significant and positive influence on both brand love and brand loyalty. Furthermore, brand love acts as a significant mediator in strengthening the relationship between the independent variables and brand loyalty. These results highlight the importance of emotional bonds in shaping consumer behavior, especially among younger generations who seek identity and expression through the brands they use. The study provides practical implications for marketers of second-hand smartphones, especially Apple resellers, to build stronger engagement strategies by emphasizing identity alignment and emotional experience.

Keywords: Brand Experience, Brand Love, Brand Loyalty, Consumer Brand Identification

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INTRODUCTION

The development of the technological era makes various changes to the needs of an individual. One of the needs that individuals focus on today is communication. In communicating, people currently use smartphones as communicator tools. The magnitude of people's needs for smartphones has led many brands to differentiate their products, which has resulted in the growth of the smartphone market in Indonesia increasing significantly in the last few years. The variety of products offered by differentiated smartphone brands makes consumers increasingly vulnerable to the emergence of innovations that are superior to other existing brands in the market (Majid et al., 2018). Based on data on smartphone users in Indonesia, it is said that in 2022 around 67.88% of the Indonesian

population aged 5 years and over already have a smartphone device (BPS, 2022). Therefore, Gen Z (Gen Z) will dominate the use of smartphones in Indonesia (Evita et al., 2023).

One of the smartphone brands that continues to experience the growth of Gen Z users in Indonesia is Apple with its flagship product, the iPhone. In the market, the iPhone brings a different concept of high price, best product quality, and superior features. The superior features of the iPhone provide a distinctive experience in using the Apple brand. Although the price offered by the iPhone is quite expensive and there are no discounts given to buyers, does not dampen the enthusiasm of the Gen Z segment to use the iPhone. One way to own an iPhone is to buy a used product. The price offered by a second iPhone is much cheaper than a new iPhone. The process of buying a used iPhone in recent years has become a new trend. This is driven by the fact that there are still many used iPhones that have good condition and quality so that the features sought by users can still be utilized. The increasing trend of using second iPhones is evidenced by the iPhone being the best-selling second smartphone in 2022 with 49% of the global market (Databoks, 2023).

There are various reasons for Gen Z has preference for the iPhone, one of which is that the features of the iPhone are superior to other smartphones. The advantage of this feature lies in the experience of using a clearer iPhone camera. This advantage provides a separate experience in using a brand or called a brand experience. Brand experience is a special response that arises from consumers involving sensations, feelings, understanding, and behavioral responses arising from a particular brand which is influenced by several factors such as brand identity and product marketing conditions (Brakus et al., 2009). Brand experience is a determinant for creating loyal customers. Brand experience has a relationship with consumers' personal responses when carrying out the process of direct interaction with the brand.

Another reason for the use of iPhone by Gen Z is consumptive behavior and not wanting to miss the trend. The reason for not wanting to miss the trend grows when Gen Z feels ownership of a brand or is called consumer brand identification. Consumer brand identification is a feeling of ownership in a brand and feeling a unity in the brand as a way to provide self-expression to consumers (Christina et al., 2023). When consumers find a brand that is considered in accordance with their identity, it will create a sense of confidence in using the brand, in this case the iPhone. Moreover, in the market, iPhone positions itself as a premium brand that not everyone can afford. Premium brands have symbolic meaning so that consumers use the Apple brand to achieve their fundamental identity goals (Putu et al., 2021).

Creating a strong brand identity and fostering a sense of consumer identification with their brand can lead to an increase in brand lovers or so-called brand lovers. Brand love is a strong emotional bond that builds between consumers and the brand. certain brands (Batra et al., 2012). With the impact of consumer love, it is reflected in the level of consumer satisfaction caused by positive responses and emotional experiences that consumers experience when interacting with a brand. Thus, a consumer can form and develop a loving relationship with a brand, just like with other people. Brand love has an important role in consumer behavior related to the concept of loyalty, very high prices, and positive word-of-mouth communication (Albert & Merunka, 2013). The emotion of love for a brand influences the level of consumer engagement and their ability to recommend their favorite brand to others. Even though the price offered by the brand is higher, consumers are still willing to pay to get products from the brand. In the short term, love for the brand will increase usage intention and in the long term it will help increase customer loyalty (Alnawas & Altarifi, 2016).

The emotional connection and affection found in brand love influences the willingness of consumers to be exclusively loyal to a brand. Loyalty to the brand is very important to maintain the survival of the Apple company. Brand loyalty is defined as customer loyalty in the form of a commitment to make a way of repurchasing products on a brand in the future despite the influence of situational conditions and barriers to switching brands (Roberts, 2015). Customers who have a loyalty commitment to a brand will be willing to spend more money to buy premium products without thinking that other brands have the same offer at a lower price (Santos & Schlesinger, 2021a). Gen Z's brand loyalty tends to be unique by continuing to buy the same brand and trying to switch brands (Bilgihan, 2016).

The phenomenon of loyalty to using a second iPhone in Gen Z for various reasons such as brand experience and consumer brand identification has a uniqueness to be studied. In addition, on the other hand, there are differences in empirical research on the issue of brand loyalty in Gen Z, namely Abdelkader and Attallah (2021) argue in their research that brand experience has a significant impact on loyalty as shown through behavior with a sample study consisting of 45% of Gen Z. Meanwhile, based on the research of Bilgihan (2016), it is stated that Gen Z has a problem to keep buying iPhone secondhand in Gen Z. Meanwhile, based on research by Bilgihan (2016), it is stated that Gen Z has a problem to keep buying the appropriate brand and switching brands on the other hand. This shows a lack of behavioral loyalty and inconsistency of results in Gen Z subjects. This behavior is caused by negative attitudes towards brands and loyalty, with a lack of trust and a feeling of loss of freedom. Brand loyalty is created when consumers have connected with the brand, they tend to make purchases by demanding more because they know the impact of brand sustainability (Zhang et al., 2020). However, other studies also say that brand loyalty can be created without having to go through the brand love process (Bae & Kim, 2023).

Other empirical research states that brand experience has a significant influence on brand loyalty (Bae & Kim, 2023; Huang, 2017; Khan et al., 2021; Madeline & Sihombing, 2019). Inconsistencies occur in other studies if brand experience has no significant effect on brand loyalty (Fernandes & Inverneiro, 2021). Similar to the brand experience variable, the consumer brand identification variable also has two different results. The first result says if consumer brand identification has a significant influence on brand loyalty (Christina et al., 2023; Chung & Park, 2017; Demar et al., 2022; Tuškej et al., 2013; Yeh et al., 2016). The second result says if consumer brand identification has no significant effect on brand loyalty (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Nam et al., 2011).

This research is unique in its focus on Gen Z iPhone users who buy second-hand iPhones, which has not been widely discussed in the marketing literature. This study incorporates Consumer-Brand Relationship theory to understand how brand experience and consumer brand identification influence brand loyalty through brand love. In contrast to previous studies that have focused on new iPhone users, this study provides a new perspective on loyalty behavior in second-hand iPhone buyers.

From the existing problems, it can be seen that loyalty in Gen Z has several contradictory results. Therefore, researchers took a point of view with the perspective of consumer brand relationship theory to find out the loyalty of Gen Z. In addition, researchers also want to get information on what is the biggest impetus for Gen Z who are willing to spend quite a lot of money just to buy a used iPhone. The existence of this research can have an impact in the literature in the development of brand management science and practically can help the used iPhone marketing team to find out the consumer behavior of their products, especially samples in Malang City. It is hoped that the level of loyalty from second iPhone users can be formed by utilizing the experience and identification variables that Apple has.

The purpose of this research is to explore the factors influencing brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers in Indonesia, particularly in relation to their preference for used iPhones. The study aims to understand how brand experience and consumer brand identification contribute to the loyalty of this demographic, despite the high prices associated with new iPhone models.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Brand Relationship

A brand is now recognized as a relational instrument for vendors when it is designated as a “preferred brand” by consumers (Mishra et al., 2021). The consumer-brand relationship pertains to the interaction between individuals and brands that is either voluntarily established or coerced through interdependence between brands and individuals (Fetscherin et al., 2014). The theoretical framework of consumer-brand relationships is predicated on the notion that individuals cultivate diverse forms of relationships with entities that differ from themselves. The concept of consumer-brand relationships advocates for the application of relationship marketing principles to elucidate consumer-brand affiliations and brand loyalty. There exist multiple theoretical perspectives to delineate consumer-brand relationships, including brand relationship quality (Fournier, 1998) and brand love (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Batra et al., 2012). An accurate conceptualization of the evolution of consumer-brand relationships necessitates the integration of attitudinal dimensions (cognitive, affective, conative) alongside behavioral dimensions. Moreover, the significance of brand experience and consumer-brand identification occupies a pivotal role in the construction of consumer-brand relationship theory. Firstly, brand experience assesses consumer behavior in a more holistic manner than alternative marketing paradigms, as it encapsulates a comprehensive interaction between consumers and brands (Brakus et al., 2009). Furthermore, considering that brand identification is intrinsically linked to the identity perspective, it serves as a suitable metaphor for expounding various components of the consumer-brand relationship (Zhang et al., 2020).

Brand Experience

The construct of brand experience may be characterized as a subjective reaction from consumers that encompasses internal dimensions such as sensations, emotions, and comprehension, along with behavioral reactions elicited by various brand-related stimuli, which include elements such as brand design and identity, packaging, communication, and the environmental context (Brakus et al., 2009). For instance, an aesthetically pleasing visual presentation of a banking application can elicit sensory, emotional, and cognitive experiences from its users. Consequently, brand experience pertains to the delivery of consistent performance and the realization of the brand promise, thereby reflecting the perception of an individual's interaction with a brand (Ding & Tseng, 2015). The brand experience for each individual is distinct in terms of its strength and intensity, suggesting that every person has the potential to encounter a superior brand experience. Moreover, the acquisition of brand experiences manifests in diverse manners; some experiences occur spontaneously without reflection, whereas others are fostered through prolonged engagement. Brand experience is differentiated from brand attitude in that it is non-evaluative, indicating that it transcends mere preferences regarding a brand (van de Sand, 2017). Brand experience predominantly concerns the emotional responses associated with the brand, which may culminate in an overarching evaluation. Brand experience can be quantified using four indicators, specifically sensation, feeling, response, and cognition.

Consumer Brand Identification

The phenomenon of consumer brand identification is derived from two theoretical frameworks, specifically consumer-company identification and social identity theory. Within the realm of social identity theory, individuals exhibit a propensity to enhance their self-concept by associating with a specific social group. Concurrently, consumer-company identification is characterized as a proactive and selective process motivated by the fulfillment of one or more personal needs in relation to the organization. In accordance with this theoretical perspective, Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) articulate consumer brand identification as a psychological state wherein consumers perceive a sense of unity with brands that facilitate the realization of their identity through these brands. In the context of marketing, consumers are inclined to cultivate and sustain their affiliations with a brand. This inclination is intensified when they experience heightened self-perception and derive substantial social and psychological advantages from their engagement with the brand (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) propose that consumer brand identification is indicated by three primary dimensions: brand-self similarity, brand distinctiveness, and brand social benefits.

Brand Love

Emotional sentiments that were historically directed solely towards individuals are now increasingly observed in the relationship between consumers and products or commodities. As articulated by Sarkar et al., (2013), brand love is conceptualized as a profound and fervent emotional bond experienced by consumers who derive fulfillment from a specific brand. Such feelings of affection enhance consumers' favorable perceptions of the brand, which subsequently influences their behavior. Consequently, in addition to facilitating the acquisition of positive brand-related information, affectionate sentiments can also mitigate the potentially adverse effects associated with negative information. The construct of brand love finds its origins in social psychology, specifically rooted in the theoretical framework of interpersonal love (Huang, 2017). Brand love may be interpreted as an extreme manifestation of external influence. When consumers experience love for a brand upon first encounter, they exhibit profound and ardent emotions from the outset. The phenomenon of love at first sight aligns with the dynamics of interpersonal love, characterized by a clear bidirectional interaction between the consumer and the brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Consumers anticipate the experience of exhilaration as an integral component of their interactions with the brand. According to Sarkar et al. (2013), brand love is characterized by two principal indicators: intimacy and passion.

Relationship between Brand Experience, Consumer Brand Identification, and Brand Love

Consumers decide to buy a branded product, they have certain expectations of the product. If the value obtained from the product exceeds their expectations, it will result in a satisfying experience when using the brand. Brand experience is subjective and internal, evoked by brand-related stimuli with the hope of predicting strong emotional responses such as brand love. Similarly, brand identification is one of the two determinants of brand love. A consumer who identifies with a brand will develop positive feelings towards that brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013). In self-identity theory if consumers get confirmation of constantly interacting with a particular brand, then consumers will express emotional attachment to the brand. The impact obtained the more the brand helps in identity verification, the stronger the love and enthusiasm for the brand with customers (Snyder, 2019). The above statement is in line with some previous research results on the population of smartphone users, the results show that brand experience has a positive and significant influence on brand love (Anggara et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2021; Safeer et al., 2020). The above statement is in line with some previous research results on the population of smartphone users, the results show that consumer brand identification has a positive and significant influence on brand love (Al-Afridawi & Rasool, 2022; Ghorbanzadeh, 2024 ; Koner et al., 2023).

H₁: Brand experience has a direct positive and significant effect on brand love

H₂: Consumer brand identification has a direct positive and significant effect on brand love

Relationship between Brand Experience, Consumer Brand Identification, and Brand Loyalty

Brands that consistently deliver engagement at every juncture of interaction between brands and consumers are capable of cultivating brand loyalty. Consequently, consumers will be incentivized to repeatedly engage with the experience over an extended period. Furthermore, brand experience will not solely influence retrospective satisfaction assessments but will also impact prospective customer loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). Hence, consumers are more inclined to select products from that particular brand in the future, recommend them to others, and exhibit a diminished likelihood of purchasing from rival brands. When consumers resonate with a brand, they engage in purchasing behaviors and concurrently establish loyalty towards the brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). The extent to which the brand is assimilated into the self-concept and the perceived benefits derived from the brand significantly enhance consumers' willingness to allocate their social, financial, and temporal resources to nurture and appreciate brand relationships (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). This assertion aligns with findings from prior studies focusing on smartphone users, which indicate that brand experience exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on brand loyalty (Akoglu et al., 2021; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021; Alam & Khalique, 2019). This claim

is also corroborated by earlier research findings concerning the smartphone user demographic, demonstrating that consumer brand identification positively and significantly affects brand loyalty (Demar et al., 2022; Nam & Trang, 2020; Natalia et al., 2021). Additionally, this assertion is consistent with previous research results on the smartphone user population, revealing that brand love has a positive and statistically significant impact on brand loyalty (Akin, 2017; Bazi et al., 2023; Mody & Hanks, 2020).

H₃: Brand experience exerts a direct positive and statistically significant effect on brand loyalty

H₄: Consumer brand identification demonstrates a direct positive and significant effect on brand loyalty

H₅: Brand love manifests a direct positive and statistically significant effect on brand loyalty

Mediation of Brand Love between Brand Experience and Consumer Brand Identification on Brand Loyalty

The emotional affiliation that individuals develop with a brand can serve as a motivational factor for consumers to repeatedly select the same brand, offer affirmative recommendations regarding the brand to their peers, purchase additional products under the same brand umbrella, and prioritize the brand as their preferred choice. The phenomenon of brand affection, when coupled with brand experience, culminates in a robust emotional bond between the brand and its consumers, ultimately fostering consumer attitudes of brand loyalty (Huang, 2017; Santos & Schlesinger, 2021). Consumers who frequently identify with specific brands tend to purchase more products and deliver brand endorsements with considerable fervor as a form of self-expression. Prior investigations indicate that consumer brand identification exerts a positive influence on brand loyalty, particularly among younger demographics. Furthermore, the consumption patterns of young individuals, particularly those belonging to Gen Z, are driven by an expressive need that arises from brand affection. This assertion aligns with various previous studies that affirm the mediating role of brand love in the positive correlation between consumer brand identification and brand loyalty (Alnawas & Altarifi, 2016; Fitriani & Achmad, 2021; Harjadi et al., 2023).

H₆: Brand experience exerts an indirect effect on brand loyalty through the mediating variable of brand love

H₇: Consumer brand identification demonstrates an indirect effect on brand loyalty through the mediating variable of brand love

METHOD

This study aims to measure the mediating effect of brand love which is thought to influence the formation of loyalty in smartphone users with the independent variables being brand experience and consumer brand identification. This research focuses on iPhone users in the Gen Z category located in Malang City. The approach used in this research is a quantitative approach. This approach was chosen because the data is in the form of numbers and to obtain research conclusions, statistical tools are needed. The type of research chosen is descriptive research and explanatory research. In the process of implementation, explanatory research uses a survey approach, where samples are taken from a certain population and data is collected through the use of questionnaires. The population in this study are individuals from Gen Z who use iPhones in Malang City, which is based on the number of members of the Facebook group “Jual Beli iPhone Bekas” Malang City of more than 117 thousand members. In this study, the sampling technique used was non-probability sampling, using purposive sampling method. The criteria used to determine the sample were Gen Z in the city of Malang who had used an iPhone for at least one month, which is the minimum exposure to brand experience. To ensure that respondents fit the Gen Z category, we included a screening question on year of birth and verified that it fell within the range of 1997-2012. Harman's single-factor test was used to test for common method bias (CMB). The results showed that the first factor accounted for less than 50% of the total variance, indicating no significant CMB problem. The number of samples in this study was determined based on the recommendation of Gudergan et al. (2025) which suggests using a minimum sample size of about 10 times the total number of indicators. Thus, this study will use a sample size of around 130 samples, which is equivalent to 13 indicators. However, to improve the accuracy and consistency of the Partial Least SEM-PLS estimation results, the researcher added a sample of 60 so that the overall total was 190 samples.

Data were collected through personally administered questionnaires and online questionnaires. Online questionnaires can be distributed to respondents who are not in the same area as the researcher easily and quickly. The researcher only needs to share the link of the questionnaire to the respondents. In addition, most online questionnaires store answers from respondents in the form of tables and graphs that will make it easier for researchers to analyze the data. The measurement scale used for this research is an interval scale. This type of scale is a five-point Likert Scale, 5 means “strongly agree” and 1 means “strongly disagree”. Each scale of assessment criteria is divided according to the interval value of the existing variables.

This study uses the Partial Least SEM-PLS to test the hypothesis. The model in this study is reflective. A model is said to be reflective when the items are interchangeable and correlated. All indicators are representative. The variables retain their meaning so that a variable can eliminate an indicator without having a major impact on the object of research. Validity testing is done when looking at convergent and discriminant validity values.

Convergent validity evaluation involves the value of outer loading or loading factor and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The standard outer loading value used is 0.70, while AVE is considered adequate if it is greater than 0.50 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Discriminant validity assessment is carried out through the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT), the minimum value of which is < 0.9 (Voorhees et al., 2016). Furthermore, the reliability test will look at the Cronbach Alpha value. An instrument is considered reliable when the coefficient value exceeds 0.7 which indicates that the tool is reliable (Gudergan et al., 2025). The structural model test or outer model will use the R-Square value to measure the ability of endogenous latent variables to predict a model. The categorization of the R-Square value is divided into 3 models, namely weak, moderate, and substantial with score values of 0.25, 0.5, and 0.75 respectively (Gudergan et al., 2025). Finally, the assessment of the collective influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable with the F-Square value, which classifies the level of influence of latent variables into weak, medium and large at a value of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35.

RESULT

Respondent Characteristics

The number of samples obtained in this study ranged from 190 samples with a minimum sample set at the beginning of 130. Overall, the number of female respondents dominated according to the initial expectations of the study as much as 83% with an age range of 20-24 years by 70% and working as a student. From the findings of this study, it is known that used iPhone users in Malang City have a monthly expenditure of IDR 500,000 - IDR 1,250,000 which is in the low expenditure category. The respondents view that they are included in the category of loyal iPhone users because they have used the iPhone for more than 6 months as much as 51%. This information can also be seen in the summary of its characteristics presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Variable	Total	Percentage
Gender		
-Man	33	17%
-Woman	157	83%
Age		
-16 – 19 years	15	8%
-20 – 24 years	133	70%
-15 – 28 years	42	22%
Work		
-Student	89	47%
-Private sector employee	51	27%
-Government employees	32	17%
-Businessman	16	8%
-Other	2	1%
Average Expenditure (month)		
-Rp 500,000 – Rp 1,250,000	72	38%
-Rp 1,500,000 –Rp 2,500,000	57	30%
-More than Rp 2,500,000	61	32%
Length of Use		
- 1 – 3 Month	20	11%
- 3 – 6 Month	72	38%
- > 6 Month	98	51%

Table 2. Variable Measurement

Variable	Indicator	Total Item	Scale	References
Brand Experience	-Sensation -Feeling -Response -Cognition	12 items	Likert scale 1–5	Brakus et al. (2009)
Consumer Brand Identification	-Brand–Self Similarity -Brand Distinctiveness -Brand Social Benefit	6 items	Likert scale 1–5	Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012)
Brand Love	-Intimacy -Passion	5 items (BLV3 delete)	Likert scale 1–5	Albert & Merunka (2013); Sarkar et al. (2013)

Variable	Indicator	Total Item	Scale	References
Brand Loyalty	- Commitment to Brand - Willingness to Pay More - Continuous Use - Advocacy	8 items (BLY1 delete)	Likert scale 1–5	Roberts (2015)

Descriptive Statistics

In this research, each variable has an indicator that is used to measure each existing construct. On the brand experience variable. Has four indicators which are translated into 12 question items. The consumer brand identification variable has three indicators which are translated into six question items. The brand love variable has two indicators which are translated into six question items. However, after data processing, it was decided to remove item BLV3. The brand loyalty variable has four indicators, namely commitment to the brand, dare to pay more, use continuously, and provide defense which are explained into nine question items. Similar to brand love, the brand loyalty variable experienced problems in measuring HTMT because the correlation level was very high so that the BLY1 item was removed for the final processing process.

Table 3. Variable Frequency Distribution

Variables/Indicators	Category	Average
Brand Experience	strongly agree	4.25
- Sensation	strongly agree	4.29
- Feeling	strongly agree	4.29
- Response	agree	4.16
- Cognition	strongly agree	4.24
Consumer Brand Identification	agree	4.01
- Brand Self-similarity	agree	4.13
- Brand Distinctiveness	agree	3.95
- Brand Social Benefit	agree	3.93
Brand Love	agree	4.14
- Intimacy	strongly agree	4.21
- Passion	agree	4.05
Brand Loyalty	agree	4.13
- Commitment to the Brand	agree	4.17
- Dare to Pay More	agree	4.14
- Use Continuously	agree	4.16
- Provide Defense	agree	4.09

Based on the frequency distribution in Table 3, it is known that overall all items get a good category. In the brand experience variable, the highest mean value is item 3 of 4.36 and the lowest mean value is item 7 of 4.05 which is still in the good category. This shows that consumers feel that the design updates that the iPhone has in each series provide its own distinctive style that is in accordance with current trends and Gen Z preferences in general. In the consumer brand identification variable, there is an item with the highest mean value, namely item 2 of 4.15 which is in the very good category. While the lowest item is item 4 with a good category. This shows that the iPhone is believed to provide similarities between one user and another. Furthermore, in the brand love variable, there is an item with the highest mean value, namely item 2 of around 4.26 which is in the very good category. This shows that iPhone consumers feel a feeling of comfort and pleasure when using the iPhone as if the iPhone has fulfilled the desires of their smartphone needs. Finally, in the brand loyalty variable, there is an item with the highest mean value, namely item 2 around 4.26 which is in the very good category. This shows that consumers are willing to recommend iPhone smartphones to others if the person closest to them needs information about the smartphone brand.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

Each construct is analyzed using outer model evaluation to ensure that the construct adequately reflects the concept in question and has adequate validity and reliability. The results of the evaluation carried out showed that all items had an outer loading value of >0.7 and an average variance extracted (AVE) value of >0.5 so that the convergent validity results of the research were valid. For the internal consistency test, reliability is measured by Cronbach Alpha values >0.7 and Composite Reliability >0.7 . The results obtained by all items were categorized as reliable in measuring each variable.

Table 4. Validity and Reliability of Latent Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Experience	0.918	0.929	0.523
Consumer Brand Identification	0.862	0.897	0.545
Brand Love	0.833	0.878	0.546
Brand Loyalty	0.896	0.915	0.594

Table 5. Outer Loading Items

	Brand Experience (BE)	Consumer Brand Identification (CB)	Brand Love (BLV)	Brand Loyalty (Y)
BE1	0.750			
BE2	0.727			
BE3	0.704			
BE4	0.717			
BE5	0.717			
BE6	0.704			
BE7	0.732			
BE8	0.718			
BE9	0.729			
BE10	0.745			
BE11	0.724			
BE12	0.712			
CBI1		0.770		
CBI2		0.735		
CBI3		0.751		
CBI4		0.793		
CBI5		0.846		
CBI6		0.722		
BLV1			0.740	
BLV2			0.712	
BLV4			0.782	
BLV5			0.717	
BLV6			0.739	
BLY2				0.726
BLY3				0.740
BLY4				0.739
BLY5				0.748
BLY6				0.716
BLY7				0.731
BLY8				0.742
BLY9				0.731

Discriminant validity is calculated using Heterotrait – Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The reason for using this method is because some experts have the opinion that the use of cross loading and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion is less sensitive in assessing discriminant validity. This method uses a multitrait-multi method matrix as the basis for measurement. The results of the discriminant validity calculation can be seen in Table 6. Based on the table, it can be concluded that the discriminant validity test carried out on each variable produces a value that has been used as a guideline, namely less than 0.9. The stage for achieving this HTMT value is to reduce several constructs that have the highest correlation compared to other constructs. Some of the constructs that were removed to get such values were the BLV3 and BLY1 items. In this way, these variables were declared valid and respondents did not experience difficulties in filling out the questionnaire.

Table 6. Discriminant Validity Test

Criteria HTMT	Brand Experience	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Consumer Brand Identification
Brand Experience				
Brand Love	0.696			
Brand Loyalty	0.726	0.885		
Consumer Brand Identification	0.639	0.888	0.868	

Table 7. R-Square of Latent Variables

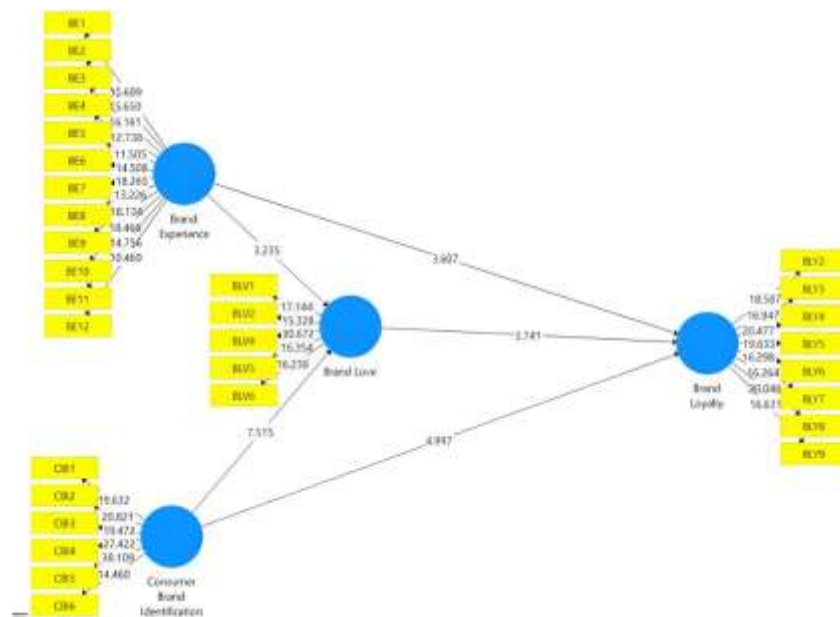
Endogenous Variable	R Square	Information
Brand Love	0.605	Currently
Brand Loyalty	0.694	Currently

Based on Table 7, it can be concluded that the R-Square value of the endogenous variable brand love has a value of 0.605 or 60.5% which can be interpreted as the exogenous variable brand experience and consumer brand identification. The remaining 39.5% of variable relationships are interpreted in other variables outside the variables of this research. Furthermore, the R-Square value of the endogenous variable brand loyalty is 0.694 or 69%, so it can be said that the brand loyalty variable is defined as the exogenous variable brand experience and consumer brand identification at around 69%. The two R-Square values of the endogenous variables are included in the medium or moderate category.

Table 8. f Square Latent Variable

Variable	F-Square
Brand Experience → Brand Love	0.116
Consumer Brand Identification → Brand Loyalty	0.578
Brand Experience → Brand Loyalty	0.114
Consumer Brand Identification → Brand Love	0.206
Brand Love → Brand Loyalty	0.125

In the table above, it can be seen that the F-Square coefficient value for the influence of brand experience on brand love is in the small category. Likewise, the influence of brand experience on brand loyalty and the influence of brand love on brand loyalty. The medium category in this research is the influence of consumer brand identification on brand loyalty. Finally, the influence of brand consumer identification on brand love is an F-Square value in the large category, namely 0.578. The following are the results of bootstrapping on Partial Least Square analysis (PLS) which is illustrated through the path diagram of the research model, see Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Research Model

Based on Figure 1, if the path coefficient is positive, then the influence of the variable is unidirectional. If an exogenous variable is assessed as increasing, the value of the endogenous variable will also increase. The significance rules used are the P-Values and T-Statistic values, where if the P-Values < 0.05 and have a T-Statistic > 1.96 then the significance level is categorized as significant. The following are the results of the hypothesis testing carried out (Table 9).

Table 9. Bootstrapping

Path	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values
Brand Experience → Brand Love	0.265	3.069	0.002
Consumer Brand Identification → Brand Love	0.591	6.798	0.000
Brand Experience → Brand Loyalty	0.244	3.889	0.000
Consumer Brand Identification → Brand Loyalty	0.390	5.115	0.000
Brand Love → Brand Loyalty	0.311	3.697	0.000
Brand Experience → Brand Love → Brand Loyalty	0.082	2.148	0.003
Consumer Brand Identification → Brand Love → Brand Loyalty	0.184	3.552	0.000

Based on the Table 9, the results of statistical analysis of second-generation iPhone users from Gen Z in Malang City, it is found that brand experience and consumer brand identification directly have a positive and significant effect on brand love, with T-Statistic values of 3.069 and 6.798 respectively and path coefficient of 0.265 and 0.591. Furthermore, brand experience and consumer brand identification are also proven to directly have a significant effect on brand loyalty with a T-Statistic of 3.889 and 5.115 and a path coefficient of 0.244 and 0.390. In addition, brand love itself has a significant positive influence on brand loyalty (T-Statistic 3.697; path coefficient 0.311). The mediation test also shows that brand love significantly mediates the effect of brand experience and consumer brand identification on brand loyalty, indicated by a T-Statistic of 2.148 and 3.552 respectively, with a path coefficient of 0.082 and 0.184. All hypotheses are accepted because they meet the statistical requirements of $T > 1.96$ and $p\text{-value} < 0.05$.

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Brand Experience on Brand Love

The relationship between brand experience and brand love is accepted, meaning that the brand experience variable has a positive and significant direct influence on brand love in Gen Z second iPhone users in Malang City. Thus, the results of this study are in line with previous research with smartphone objects (Huang, 2017; Iqbal et al., 2021; Safeer et al., 2020) which states that there is a significant influence on the relationship between brand experience and brand love. When consumers experience satisfaction and pleasure when using a brand, they internally develop emotions and love for the brand (Huang, 2017). The development of these emotions is the result of consumers' internal experiences in dealing with external objects. Furthermore, this proves that the above results are in line with the theory of consumer brand relationships related to individuals will develop various types of relationships with brands voluntarily when satisfied experiences are obtained when using the brand.

A strong brand experience evokes positive emotions that strengthen the consumer's emotional connection to the brand. Among second-hand iPhone users in Gen Z, engaging visuals, intuitive interaction, and reliable performance continue to create an exclusive perception, despite the device being used. This demonstrates that both functional and emotional elements of brand experience can compensate for the limitations of second-hand products. Moreover, brand experience creates symbolic associations that shape how consumers perceive the brand's uniqueness. Apple, for example, continues to represent a lifestyle and social identity for users, regardless of product age. This suggests that brand experience extends beyond product features—it encompasses storytelling and brand image as well.

The Effect of Consumer Brand Identification on Brand Love

The relationship between consumer brand identification to brand love is accepted, meaning that the consumer brand identification variable has a direct positive and significant influence on brand love in Gen Z second iPhone users in Malang City. So the results of this study are in line with previous research with the object of smartphones (Al-Afridawi & Rasool, 2022; Ghorbanzadeh, 2024; Koner et al., 2023). If consumers' identity is regularly reinforced through engagement with a particular brand, they will increasingly show emotional attachment to that brand. In other words, this correlates with self-identity theory which states that individuals create better affinity towards brands that affirm their identity. As a result, the more a brand assist in identity verification, the stronger the love and enthusiasm for the brand.

Consumer brand identification acts as a mirror of self-image that users want to project. For Gen Z, who are typically expressive and trend-driven, the Apple brand reflects prestige, modernity, and social connection. The desire to belong to a distinct community of Apple users nurtures emotional attachment and love toward the brand. Additionally, the perceived similarity between the brand and the consumer enhances psychological closeness. This connection is not just built on functional benefits, but also on symbolic alignment with the brand's identity. As this identification grows stronger, so does the consumer's emotional investment and long-term engagement.

The Effect of Brand Experience on Brand Loyalty

The relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty is accepted, meaning that the brand experience variable has a direct positive and significant influence on brand loyalty in Gen Z who use a second iPhone in Malang City. Thus, the results of this study are in line with previous research with the object of smartphones (Akoglu et al., 2021; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021). Brands that provide an excellent experience will be a differentiator in the minds of consumers. The brand will be seen as having its own charm and is highly favored, so it will build brand loyalty and encourage the spread of the brand (Brakus et al., 2009). Therefore, consumers will be very likely to repurchase from the brand and recommend it to others.

Brand experience has a direct and statistically significant impact on loyalty, indicating that a satisfying experience—even with a second-hand product—can reinforce consumer commitment. Gen Z iPhone users continue to show high intentions to recommend and repurchase due to the consistently positive experience associated with the brand. This highlights how experience quality can lead to repeat preference. From a psychological perspective, positive experiences foster trust and expectation, reinforcing the decision to stick with the brand. In an environment filled with competing choices, memorable experiences serve as a key differentiator. Thus, brand experience forms the emotional and rational foundation for customer loyalty.

The Effect of Consumer Brand Identification on Brand Loyalty

The relationship between consumer brand identification and brand loyalty is accepted, meaning that the consumer brand identification variable has a direct positive and significant influence on brand loyalty in Gen Z who use a second iPhone in Malang City. The results of this study are in line with previous research with smartphone objects (Demar et al., 2022). According to Demar et al. (2022), this happens because Apple is considered a “cult brand” that has a strong personality based on non-conformity, innovation, and creativity. Therefore, marketing campaigns carried by Apple such as “Think Different” enlighten these characteristics with relevant symbols of individuality and empowerment. This result is corroborated by identification theory that consumer brand identification is motivated by two mechanisms: the need for consistency and the need for self-esteem. High conformity or identity similarity between brands and consumers facilitates a strong sense of belonging from consumers and develops identification.

This study affirms that consumer identification with a brand significantly contributes to the formation of brand loyalty. It is not just about liking the product—it is about how much the brand reflects the consumer’s personal values and aspirations. This identity alignment leads to stronger loyalty, even in the face of higher prices or limited product features. In a depth, brand identification offers social and emotional value, which consumers use to shape their self-image. Users who feel symbolically connected to a brand are more resilient against switching to competitors. This shows how brand identity functions as a psychological anchor for long-term customer commitment.

The Effect of Brand Love on Brand Loyalty

The relationship between brand love and brand loyalty is accepted, meaning that the brand love variable has a positive and significant direct influence on brand loyalty in Gen Z second iPhone users in Malang City. As a results of this study are in line with previous research with smartphone objects (Akin, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). A person's initial purchase of a product or service shows their short-term liking and desire for the brand. However, their long-term commitment is shown by repeated purchases of the same product or service. Therefore, Apple has realized that consumers' love for their brand is crucial if they are to build strong customer relationships, a brand that can make customers love their brand that can make their customers love their brands are more effective in maintaining long-term competitive advantage and outperforming their competitors.

The Effect of Brand Experience on Brand Loyalty through Brand Love

The relationship between brand love mediation is accepted, meaning that the brand experience variable has a positive and significant indirect effect on brand loyalty through brand love in Gen Z second iPhone users in Malang City. So the results of this study are in line with previous research with smartphone objects (Huang, 2017; Santos & Schlesinger, 2021). Brand love creates a sense of loyalty and a willingness to overlook mistakes or shortcomings made by the brand. On the contrary, customers who do not feel love for the brand are less likely to show loyalty. Even if they have a positive experience with a brand, they may not feel a strong emotional connection to the brand and may be more likely to switch to a competitor. The results of this study can provide information even though Gen Z has higher price sensitivity than older generations (Koksal, 2019). However, price problems can be overcome by buying iPhone products which in fact have high prices by buying products in used conditions due to the experience of use accompanied by brand love.

Brand love is not merely a transient emotional response—it plays a pivotal role in sustaining long-term loyalty. When consumers develop a deep emotional bond with a brand, they become more resistant to competitive offerings and more forgiving of occasional flaws. This emotional attachment transforms transactional relationships into enduring connections, which is critical in highly competitive technology markets. For Gen Z,

whose brand preferences are heavily influenced by emotional engagement and identity alignment, brand love becomes the anchor of loyalty. Therefore, Apple's ability to cultivate brand love—even among second-hand users—demonstrates its strength in building durable brand-consumer relationships

Additionally, brand love stimulates behavioral loyalty such as advocacy and repeat purchases. Consumers who love a brand are more likely to recommend it to peers, acting as voluntary brand ambassadors. This kind of loyalty is invaluable as it creates organic word-of-mouth and enhances the perceived value of the brand among non-users. For second-hand iPhone users in particular, their continued loyalty—despite not buying directly from Apple—illustrates how brand love extends beyond ownership. It shows that emotional investment can sustain brand loyalty regardless of purchasing channel or product condition.

The Effect of Consumer Brand Identification on Brand Loyalty through Brand Love

The relationship between brand love mediation is accepted, meaning that the consumer brand identification variable has a positive and significant indirect effect on brand loyalty through brand love in Gen Z second iPhone users in Malang City. This study is in line with previous research with smartphone objects (Al-Afridawi & Rasool, 2022; Fitriani & Achmad, 2021). Apple customers are highly engaged with the brand, which provides them with a means to express individual and social status. The power of the brand on Apple consumers is undeniable. The associations of 'prestigious, high-quality, fashionable, elegant, trustworthy, and number one among other brands' held by its users reinforce positive self-image, status, loyalty, and positive word of mouth. Gen Z iPhone second users create such loyalty due to high admiration for the brand with the creation process through the social identity of consumers who see iPhone products as an extension of themselves.

The results show that brand experience and brand identification have a significant effect on brand loyalty, both directly and through brand love as a mediating variable. Brand love proves to be an important factor in creating brand loyalty for second-hand iPhone users, even though they buy used products. Brand identification has a greater influence than brand experience in building brand love and brand loyalty. This suggests that the perceived ownership of brand identity is more important to Gen Z iPhone users than the experience of using it. This finding shows that despite the lower price of second-hand iPhones, users still have a strong emotional attachment to the Apple brand, which reflects their social status and self-expression.

The mediation by brand love confirms that identification alone is not always enough to drive loyalty—emotional engagement amplifies its effect. When consumers see a brand as an extension of their identity, brand love enhances that connection and translates it into enduring behavioral loyalty. This is especially relevant for Gen Z, who often choose brands that reflect their lifestyle, beliefs, and self-expression. In the context of second-hand iPhones, ownership is not just about functionality but about aligning with Apple's aspirational identity. Brand love acts as the emotional reinforcement that strengthens this symbolic attachment.

Furthermore, the study illustrates how emotional branding can be more influential than traditional marketing tactics. Gen Z's brand loyalty is deeply intertwined with their desire for self-definition and belonging to a social group. When brand identification is coupled with emotional intimacy—as seen with Apple—the result is a highly engaged customer base, even among non-new product users. This emotional closeness leads to greater tolerance for product limitations and increased willingness to recommend the brand. Therefore, brand love bridges the cognitive recognition of identity fit with the emotional motivation to remain loyal.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the role of brand love as a mediating factor in the relationship between brand experience, consumer brand identification, and brand loyalty, with a specific focus on the growing trend of second-hand iPhone users among Gen Z. The main findings of this study indicate that brand experience positively and significantly influences brand love, consumer brand identification positively and significantly influences brand love, brand experience positively and significantly influences brand loyalty, consumer brand identification positively and significantly influences brand loyalty, brand love positively and significantly influences brand loyalty, brand love mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty and brand love mediates the relationship between consumer brand identification and brand loyalty. These findings contribute to the consumer-brand relationship literature by demonstrating the critical role of brand love in shaping brand loyalty, particularly among Gen Z consumers in the second-hand smartphone market, an area that has been underexplored in previous research. Implications of the study this research expands the understanding of brand loyalty formation beyond traditional new-product purchases by focusing on second-hand product buyers, it highlights the significance of emotional attachment (brand love) as a key driver of loyalty, rather than purely rational or functional benefits, and for second-hand iPhone resellers, emphasizing brand love and identity in their marketing strategies can increase perceived product value and customer engagement.

There are research limitations are limited sample scope (Malang City), making generalization to other regions challenging, quantitative method without qualitative exploration, potentially missing deeper psychological insights into brand love formation, single data collection source (Facebook users), limiting broader representation of second-hand iPhone users in Indonesia, and no consideration of external factors such as price

fluctuations of new iPhones or evolving technology trends that may impact purchase behavior and loyalty. There are some future research recommendations that is expanding the geographic scope to compare consumer behavior in various regions or between urban and rural areas, using a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) to explore deeper psychological motivations behind brand love and brand loyalty, introducing new variables such as social influence, digital media exposure, or economic factors to assess external drivers of brand loyalty and comparing brand loyalty dynamics in other premium smartphone brands to determine whether similar patterns exist outside the Apple ecosystem.

This study emphasizes the importance of emotional connections in brand loyalty development among Gen Z second-hand smartphone users. Understanding these consumer behaviors can help brands and marketers tailor their strategies to sustain customer relationships and market engagement, even beyond initial product purchases.

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