

Forging the Bond with Gen Z: The Roles of Brand Experience and Cultural Equity for Indonesian Local Fashion Brands

Memperkuat Hubungan dengan Gen Z: Peran Pengalaman Merek dan Nilai Budaya untuk Merek Fesyen Lokal Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mediating role of cultural equity in the relationship between brand experience and brand attachment, framing cultural equity as a psychological mechanism through which brand experiences are translated into enduring emotional bonds. Using a quantitative design, data were collected from consumers of Indonesian local fashion brands and analyzed through partial least squares structural equation modeling to evaluate the proposed relationships among constructs. The results show that brand experience contributes positively to the development of cultural equity and directly strengthens brand attachment. In addition, cultural equity plays a significant role in reinforcing brand attachment, indicating that culturally meaningful brand associations are central to the formation of emotional ties. The findings further demonstrate that cultural equity partially mediates the link between brand experience and brand attachment, suggesting that experiences shape attachment not only through direct affective responses but also through cultural meaning creation. Practically, these results highlight the importance for brand managers to design experiences that extend beyond functional and emotional value by embedding culturally relevant narratives and symbolism across consumer touchpoints. The study advances consumer–brand relationship literature by providing evidence that cultural equity is a critical pathway through which brand experiences evolve into deep and sustainable brand attachment.

Keywords: Brand attachment, brand experience, brand management, cultural equity, mediation, PLS-SEM.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran mediasi ekuitas budaya dalam hubungan antara pengalaman merek dan keterikatan merek, dengan menempatkan ekuitas budaya sebagai mekanisme psikologis yang menerjemahkan pengalaman merek menjadi ikatan emosional yang berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif dengan pengumpulan data dari konsumen merek fesyen lokal Indonesia, yang kemudian dianalisis menggunakan *partial least squares structural equation modeling* untuk menguji hubungan antar konstruk dalam model yang diusulkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman merek berkontribusi positif terhadap pembentukan ekuitas budaya dan secara langsung memperkuat keterikatan merek. Selain itu, ekuitas budaya berperan signifikan dalam memperkuat keterikatan merek, yang mengindikasikan bahwa asosiasi merek yang sarat makna budaya menjadi fondasi penting dalam pembentukan ikatan emosional. Temuan lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa ekuitas budaya memediasi secara parsial hubungan antara pengalaman merek dan keterikatan merek, sehingga pengalaman tidak hanya

membentuk keterikatan melalui respons afektif secara langsung, tetapi juga melalui proses pembentukan makna budaya. Secara praktis, hasil ini menegaskan pentingnya bagi pengelola merek untuk merancang pengalaman yang melampaui nilai fungsional dan emosional dengan menyisipkan narasi serta simbolisme budaya yang relevan pada setiap titik interaksi dengan konsumen. Penelitian ini memperkaya literatur hubungan konsumen–merek dengan memberikan bukti bahwa ekuitas budaya merupakan jalur krusial yang menjelaskan bagaimana pengalaman merek berkembang menjadi keterikatan emosional yang mendalam dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Brand attachment, brand experience, brand management, cultural equity, PLS-SEM.

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INTRODCUTION

In the contemporary global marketplace, a substantial paradigm shift is underway, largely driven by the values of Generation Z (Gen Z). This generation has been shown to have a marked preference for brands that offer authenticity and cultural relevance, moving beyond mere corporate ubiquity (Wiratih *et al.*, 2022). As active culture participants, Generation Z consumers do not perceive brands exclusively as product providers; rather, they regard brands as collaborators in shaping their identity. Consequently, these consumers demand a genuine alignment between their personal values and those of the brand (Salsabila *et al.*, 2024; Pillay, 2021). This fundamental shift has reshaped consumer-brand dynamics, compelling a transition from product-centric strategies to a more holistic, culturally attuned approach to building brand relationships.

This global trend has found a potent manifestation in Indonesia, marked by the rapid ascent of local fashion brands. The success of these brands is intrinsically linked to their ability to resonate with the local cultural context, offering narratives and aesthetics that feel more authentic to young Indonesian consumers. This phenomenon is further exacerbated by the influence of digital ecosystems, where Generation Z utilizes social media and e-commerce platforms to discover new products and seek inspiration (Bhuwaneshwari & Hemasuruthi, 2023; Fathinasari *et al.*, 2023). For these local brands, the challenge has evolved from merely achieving visibility to the task of converting digital engagement into profound, enduring emotional connections.

Marketing literature posits Brand Experience as a central strategy to foster such bonds. A holistic experience designed to engage consumers not only through basic transactions but on deeper levels specifically through socio-cultural connection (Relate), emotional resonance (Feel), and cognitive stimulation (Think is a crucial antecedent to forming strong relationships (Schmitt, 1999). The overarching objective of these curated experiences is to cultivate brand attachment, defined as a profound emotional connection characterized by affection, passion, and a sense of brand-self connection (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). This profound emotional connection, in turn, has been shown to drive consumer loyalty and advocacy.

While the connection between brand experience and brand attachment is well-established in the literature (Hemsley-Brown, 2022), a significant research gap persists regarding the underlying psychological mechanisms of how this emotional bond is formed within the context of culturally embedded local brands. Most previous studies have predominantly examined affective or self-alignment mediators such as brand love, self-congruity, or consumer-brand identification. However, in the context of Indonesian

local fashion brands targeting Generation Z, these constructs are insufficient. Generation Z consumers actively seek out brands that serve as cultural resources to express their local identity and heritage. Brand love and self-congruity primarily emphasize individualistic affective responses without fully capturing the collective cultural symbolism and localized narratives that drive modern fashion consumption. Therefore, this study argues that Cultural Equity is a far more relevant and powerful mediator. Cultural Equity explicitly captures the process of brand acculturation how a brand integrates into local cultural narratives to be perceived as authentic providing a missing theoretical bridge explaining how functional brand experiences transform into enduring, culturally-rooted emotional attachments.

Although prior research has extensively confirmed the direct relationship between brand experience and brand attachment, the underlying psychological mechanism explaining how experiential stimuli are transformed into enduring emotional bonds remains underexplored, particularly in culturally embedded local brand contexts. Most previous studies have examined mediators such as brand love, self-congruity, or consumer-brand identification. However, these constructs primarily emphasize affective or self-alignment dimensions without fully capturing the role of cultural symbolism and collective identity formation.

To address this, we explore three secondary questions: first, how do specific dimensions of Brand Experience namely Relate, Feel, and Think contribute to the formation of a brand's Cultural Equity? Secondly, the direct impact of this perceived cultural equity on fostering brand attachment must be examined. Finally, the extent to which Cultural Equity serves as the primary bridge linking positive brand experiences to strong, lasting Brand Attachment warrants further investigation. The subsequent inquiries delineate the methodological framework for investigating the influence of cultural relevance and meaningful brand experiences on the emotional bonds established with Gen Z consumers. The objective of this study is to provide substantial theoretical contributions by empirically evaluating a mediation model based on Holt's concepts. In addition to theoretical contributions, the study offers practical guidance for local brands seeking to establish authentic, sustainable relationships with the next generation of consumers.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Brand Experience

According to Brakus *et al.* (2009), brand experience is fundamentally understood as a set of consumers' internal and subjective responses encompassing sensations, emotions, and cognitions elicited by brand-related stimuli. The strategic foundation for creating such experiences is rooted in Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Modules framework. In accordance with the study's objective to investigate the formation of profound emotional bonds, this research strategically concentrates on three experiential dimensions that are imperative in establishing cultural significance for Generation Z. These dimensions are Feel, which addresses their necessity for authentic emotional connections; Think, which fulfills their intellectual curiosity towards brands capable of stimulating thought; and, most significantly, Relate, which directly enables the utilization of brands as a medium for expressing social identity and community affiliation fundamental behaviors of young consumers in the digital era. The significance of overseeing these experiences transcends mere theoretical postulation. Substantial empirical evidence confirms that positive brand experiences serve as strong antecedents of critical consumer outcomes, including enhanced loyalty and, most notably for this

study, the formation of strong brand attachment (Hemsley-Brown, 2022; Hwang & Lee, 2022). However, the extant research posits that the emotional impact of brand experiences is not direct. Instead, their influence is mediated through the construction of cultural meaning, a role attributed in this study to the concept of Cultural Equity.

Cultural Brand Equity

The conceptual foundation of the present study's mediating variable, Cultural Equity, is rooted in the seminal theory of Cultural Branding proposed by Holt (2004). Holt advanced the notion that iconic brands attain their status not through the possession of superior features, but rather through the creation and dissemination of compelling "cultural myths." These myths, being symbolic narratives, resonate with the anxieties and aspirations of a given generation, thereby becoming powerful vessels for identity construction. To empirically capture this phenomenon, this study adopts and operationalizes the concept of Cultural Equity, formally defined by Torelli *et al.* (2020) as "the aspect of brand equity derived from a brand's cultural symbolism and consumers' positive responses to it." This construct functions as the ideal theoretical bridge in our model, as it directly addresses the under-researched process of brand acculturation how brands must adapt and integrate into a local culture to be perceived as authentic (Shah *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, we posit that for any brand experience to foster a deep emotional bond, it must first successfully contribute to the reservoir of cultural meaning and relevance in the consumer's mind.

Brand Attachment

Centered on brand attachment, the primary outcome variable in this study is defined as a profound, enduring, and abiding emotional bond between a consumer and a brand (Japutra & Ladeska, 2023). This dynamic is typified by a profound sense of psychological intimacy and emotional investment on the part of the individual. The present study utilizes the widely validated, three-dimensional framework developed by Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005), a model whose relevance and predictive power continue to be confirmed in recent consumer studies (Moliner & Treen, 2024). This bond is conceptualized as comprising three core components: The concept of brand affection encompasses warm, friendly feelings toward the brand. Passion is characterized by intense and enthusiastic feelings. The concept of brand connection refers to a sense of the brand being an integral part of one's own identity. Among the three factors, the Connection dimension which reflects the degree to which a brand is integrated into a consumer's self-concept is considered the pinnacle of this emotional bond. It is the most significant final outcome of the cultural meaning-making process, as a strong brand-self connection is a key driver of pro-brand behaviors such as advocacy and electronic word-of-mouth (Rather & Camilleri, 2024).

Hypotesis Development

Brand Experience and Cultural Brand Equity

Based on the literature review, *brand experience* serves not merely as a trigger for momentary responses, but as the primary medium through which a brand communicates and embeds deeper meanings. The focused experiential dimensions Feel, Think, and Relate are particularly instrumental in this meaning-making process. The *Feel* dimension allows a brand to connect with consumers emotionally, essential for internalizing a "cultural myth" (Holt, 2004). The *Think* dimension fosters cognitive engagement with the brand's narratives, while the *Relate* dimension directly builds the socio-cultural bridge by enabling social identity expression and community affiliation (Pinto & Yagnik, 2023).

Collectively, these experiential dimensions work synergistically to transform a brand from a commercial entity into a relevant cultural symbol, which is the essence of Cultural Equity (Torelli *et al.*, 2020). This proposed pathway is consistent with recent empirical findings which demonstrate that brand experience is a powerful driver of overall brand equity, often through the cultivation of emotional mediators such as brand love (Ferreira, Faria, & Gabriel, 2022). This reinforces the argument that a rich and meaningful experience serves as the foundational layer upon which deeper forms of brand value, including cultural equity, are built. Therefore, a more profound brand experience is logically expected to lead to higher perceived Cultural Equity. Based on this theoretically and empirically supported argument, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Brand Experience has a significant positive effect on Cultural Equity.

Cultural Brand Equity and Brand Attachment

Once a brand successfully establishes Cultural Equity, the consumer-brand relationship fundamentally shifts from transactional to deeply relational. This study argues that Cultural Equity serves as the direct antecedent to fostering *Brand Attachment* and its core dimensions of Affection, Passion, and Connection (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Specifically, a high level of Cultural Equity nurtures the Connection dimension. When a brand becomes an integral part of a consumer's "cultural narrative" (Torelli *et al.*, 2020), it becomes inherently intertwined with their self-concept. This process of integrating a brand's symbolic meaning into one's identity is the very definition of a strong brand-self connection. Recent research confirms that this perceived brand-self congruence is a powerful predictor of emotional attachment, as consumers feel a sense of 'oneness' with brands that reflect who they are or who they aspire to be (Moliner & Treen, 2024; Rather & Camilleri, 2024). Furthermore, the perception that a brand "understands me" and represents shared cultural values naturally gives rise to Affection and Passion. A brand that is perceived as an authentic cultural symbol can evoke strong positive emotions, from warmth and trust to enthusiasm and pride (Stokinger *et al.*, 2021). This aligns with findings demonstrating that brands rich in symbolic meaning and heritage are more capable of creating the deep emotional resonance necessary for brand attachment to flourish (Japutra & Ladeska, 2023). Therefore, it is logically hypothesized that the higher a consumer's perception of a brand's cultural equity, the stronger their emotional attachment to that brand will be. Based on this argument, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Cultural Equity has a significant positive effect on Brand Attachment.

Brand Experience and Brand Attachment

Beyond its role in building cultural equity, the extant literature thoroughly documents a direct and powerful influence of brand experience on brand attachment. This relationship is considered a foundational element of consumer-brand relationship theory, proposing that the accumulation of positive and meaningful interactions serves as a primary catalyst for the formation of emotional bonds between consumers and brands (Fournier, 1998; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The underlying logic of this pathway posits that experiences that are affectively pleasant (Feel), intellectually stimulating (Think), and socially validating (Relate) collectively engender a repository of positive memories and associations with the brand (Schmitt, 1999; Brakus *et al.*, 2009). This comprehensive positive perception, in turn, naturally fosters feelings of closeness, warmth, and psychological connection the core components of brand attachment (Thomson, MacInnis,

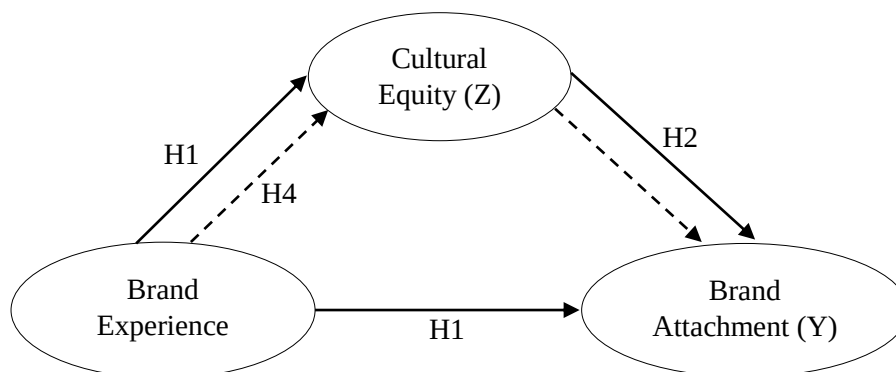
& Park, 2005). This theoretical pathway is robustly supported by a substantial body of empirical work. A substantial body of recent research corroborates the notion that a meticulously curated brand experience stands as a highly reliable predictor of brand attachment across diverse contexts (Hemsley-Brown, 2022; Hwang & Lee, 2022; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, while the model proposes a novel mediating mechanism, it is imperative to initially validate this fundamental relationship. The third hypothesis is thus formulated, guided by substantial theoretical and empirical evidence:

H3: Brand Experience has a significant positive effect on Brand Attachment.

The Mediating Role of Cultural Equity

The preceding hypotheses have established the plausible direct relationships between the core constructs of this study. However, the central thesis posits a more nuanced, indirect pathway that explains how a brand experience is transformed into a profound emotional bond. While a positive brand experience can directly foster favorable feelings (H3), its ability to generate deep, enduring brand attachment is likely dependent on a deeper meaning-making process within the consumer's mind. This involves evaluating brands not just for their function but for their role as relationship partners (Fournier & Alvarez, 2023) and as crucial cultural resources for identity construction (Kuru & Bodur, 2023). This study posits that Cultural Equity functions as a pivotal psychological mechanism in this context. The proposed logic is that experience builds cultural meaning (H1), and it is this meaning that subsequently fosters attachment (H2). In this view, Cultural Equity constitutes the pivotal interpretive process that connects the stimulus (Brand Experience) to the ultimate response (Brand Attachment). This logic aligns with a significant stream of consumer behavior research suggesting that consumers' responses to marketing stimuli are often mediated by the meaning they assign to them. The viability of such meaning-based mediation pathways has been empirically demonstrated in numerous recent studies, which successfully test the mediating role of psychological constructs like brand love (Ferreira, Faria, & Gabriel, 2022), self-congruity (Rather, 2021), and consumer-brand identification (Tu & Li, 2024). Based on this integrative argument, the final and central hypothesis of this study is proposed:

H4: Cultural Equity significantly mediates the relationship between Brand Experience and Brand Attachment.



Gambar 1. Kerangka konseptual model

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey method to collect primary data from consumers. This approach was chosen as it is optimal for testing the hypothesized cause-and-effect relationships between the latent constructs in the proposed mediation model (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The research is explanatory in nature, aiming to explain the mechanism through which brand experience influences brand attachment among a specific consumer cohort.

Population and Sampling Procedure

The target population for this study comprises Indonesian Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers who actively follow and have purchased products from Indonesian local fashion brands. A non-probability, purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit respondents who met specific, predefined criteria, ensuring the relevance of the collected data. The inclusion criteria for participation were: (1) an Indonesian citizen aged between 18 and 27 years old (a common definition for Gen Z); (2) an active user of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok; and (3) have purchased products from at least one Indonesian local fashion brand within the last six months. The sample size was determined based on established guidelines for PLS-SEM. Following the "10 times rule," which recommends a minimum sample size of 10 times the number of paths directed at the most complex endogenous construct in the model (Hair *et al.*, 2019), a target sample of over 200 respondents was deemed sufficient. A total of 275 valid responses were collected and used for the final analysis, providing adequate statistical power.

Measurement and Instrumentation

The research utilized a structured online questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure all perceptual items. The constructs were adapted from previously validated studies, while the scale for the novel construct of Cultural Equity was specifically developed for this research. Brand Experience was measured using 9 items adapted from Schmitt's (1999) and Brakus *et al.* (2009) scales, focusing on the Feel, Think, and Relate dimensions. Brand Attachment was measured using 9 items based on the tri-dimensional scale of Thomson, MacInnis, & Park (2005), covering Affection, Passion, and Connection. The scale for Cultural Equity was developed through a rigorous process. The final 9-item measure (3 items per dimension) was used for the main data collection, with psychometric properties assessed during the main data analysis phase.

Data Collection Procedure

The online questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed through various social media channels, including Instagram Stories, Twitter, and relevant online communities of local brand enthusiasts. A screening question was placed at the beginning of the survey to ensure respondents met the inclusion criteria. All participants were informed of the research purpose, assured of their anonymity and data confidentiality, and provided their informed consent before proceeding. After the collection period, the data were screened for outliers and incomplete responses, resulting in the final sample of 275 usable questionnaires.

Data Analysis Technique

The present study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4. This methodological approach was selected for its

capacity to assess intricate mediation models, its resilience with non-normal data, and its aptitude for theory development, particularly in validating the recently operationalized Cultural Equity construct (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The analysis employed a two-step approach. Initially, the measurement model was assessed to ensure reliability and validity by examining indicator loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Secondly, the structural model was evaluated by testing path coefficients (β), their significance levels (p-values) through bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, and the model's predictive power (R^2). The indirect effect was also analyzed to test the mediation hypothesis (H4).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Demographic Profile of Respondents

This section outlines the demographic and behavioral profiles of the 270 respondents, providing contextual relevance to the study's focus on Generation Z consumers of local fashion brands in Indonesia. As shown in Table 2, the sample is predominantly female (65.1 percent), consistent with the greater fashion involvement among women. The largest age group is 22–24 years (42.2 percent), aligning with the digitally engaged and trend-conscious segment of Gen Z. Geographically, nearly half of the respondents reside in Greater Jakarta (48.7 percent), with others from urban centers such as Bandung (16.4 percent), Surabaya (14.2 percent), and Semarang (8.0 percent) regions active in fashion and creative industries. Occupationally, most respondents are university students (45.5 percent) and private employees (38.2 percent), representing both aspirational and economically active youth. A significant share (70.2 percent) spend between Rp 250,001 and Rp 1,000,000 per month on fashion, indicating notable discretionary income. Behaviorally, 76.5 percent purchase fashion items monthly or more often, primarily via online marketplaces (38.5 percent) and social media platforms (24.8 percent). These patterns underscore the importance of digital channels and cultural affinity in shaping Gen Z brand experiences. Overall, the sample is highly aligned with the study's objectives, supporting the validity of examining brand experience, cultural equity, and brand attachment.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	65.1%
	Male	34.9%
Age	18–21 years	34.5%
	22–24 years	42.2%
	25–27 years	23.3%
Domicile	Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi)	48.7%
	Bandung	16.4%
	Surabaya	14.2%
	Semarang	8.0%
	Medan	6.5%
	Others	6.2%
Occupation	University Student	45.5%
	Private Sector Employee	38.2%
	Entrepreneur / Freelancer	12.7%

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Monthly Fashion Expenditure	Not Employed / Others	3.6%
	Below Rp 250,000	21.8%
	Rp 250,001 – Rp 500,000	40.7%
	Rp 500,001 – Rp 1,000,000	29.5%
	Above Rp 1,000,000	8.0%
Frequency of Fashion Purchase	Rarely (less than once every 3 months)	12.5%
	Occasionally (every 2–3 months)	35.0%
	Monthly	41.5%
Preferred Shopping Channel	Weekly	11.0%
	Online marketplace (e.g., Shopee, Tokopedia)	38.5%
	Social media (e.g., Instagram, TikTok)	24.8%
	Offline store	16.7%
	Combination (online and offline)	20.0%

Outer Model

The first is convergent validity. In this type of validity, the indicators of a construct must be highly correlated. This means that each indicator within a latent variable should be strongly correlated with the latent variable itself. Generally, the factor loading value should exceed 0.6, and the AVE (average variance extracted) value should be greater than 0.5.

Table 2. Outer Loading

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	Information
Brand Experience	BE1	0,790	Valid
	BE2	0,819	Valid
	BE3	0,833	Valid
	BE4	0,747	Valid
	BE5	0,873	Valid
Cultural Equity	CE1	0,867	Valid
	CE2	0,911	Valid
	CE3	0,810	Valid
	CE4	0,799	Valid
	CE5	0,842	Valid
Brand Attachment	BA1	0,855	Valid
	BA2	0,804	Valid
	BA3	0,781	Valid
	BA4	0,815	Valid
	BA5	0,840	Valid

In summary, the results in Table 2 demonstrate strong convergent validity for all constructs. The factor loadings surpass the acceptable threshold of 0.6, confirming that the indicators accurately measure their respective latent variables. These findings enhance the credibility of the model and support the validity of the measurement instruments used in this research.

Table 3. AVE

Variable	AVE	Criteria	Information
Brand Experience	0,637	> 0.5	Valid
Cultural Equity	0,783	> 0.5	Valid
Brand Attachment	0,739	> 0.5	Valid

All three constructs brand experience, cultural equity, and brand attachment have AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.5. This supports the convergent validity of the measurement model. This indicates that the constructs are accurately represented by their respective indicators and that the collected data is reliable for further analysis and modeling. Therefore, the findings in Table 3 reinforce the robustness and accuracy of the constructs in this study, contributing to the overall validity of the research framework.

Table 4. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

Variabel	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>
<i>Brand Experience</i>	0.850	0.884
Cultural Equity	0.750	0.842
Brand Attachment	0.855	0.902

As shown in Table 4, the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for each construct are well above the minimum threshold of 0.7, confirming the reliability and consistency of the measurement model. These findings reinforce the robustness of the constructs in the study, assuring that the collected data provides a solid foundation for further analysis and modeling.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a construct is distinct from other constructs. Ensuring that each construct in a model measures a unique concept is essential to providing valid and reliable results. This study tests discriminant validity using three methods: (1) cross loading, (2) the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and (3) the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Table 5. Cross Loading

	Brand Experience	Cultural Equity	Brand Attachment
BE1	0.740	0.556	0.555
BE2	0.678	0.522	0.512
BE3	0.585	0.508	0.472
BE4	0.698	0.577	0.571
BE5	0.749	0.626	0.628
CE1	0.580	0.711	0.598
CE2	0.633	0.831	0.776
CE3	0.639	0.843	0.740
CE4	0.505	0.721	0.591
CE5	0.602	0.844	0.782
BA1	0.554	0.745	0.798
BA2	0.576	0.654	0.766
BA3	0.589	0.652	0.794
BA4	0.606	0.758	0.845
BA5	0.641	0.795	0.867

Based on Table 5, Brand Experience (BE1–BE5) indicators show higher loadings (0.585–0.749) on their construct than Cultural Equity and Brand Attachment indicators (0.505–0.628). Similarly, the Cultural Equity indicators (CE1–CE5, BA1–BA5) have loadings between 0.711 and 0.844, which are higher than the loadings on the other constructs. Brand attachment indicators (CE1–CE5, BA1–BA5) also have higher loadings (0.776–0.902) on their construct. These patterns confirm the discriminant validity of all three constructs.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion Test

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion test is used to measure discriminant validity. In the Fornell-Larcker test, discriminant validity can be considered good if the root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) on a construct is higher than the construct's correlation with other latent variables.

Table 6. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Test

	Brand Experience	Cultural Equity	Brand Attachment
Brand Experience	0,783		
Cultural Equity	0,235	0,849	
Brand Attachment	0,584	0,193	0,824

Based on Table 6 The Fornell-Larcker criterion confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs. The square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for Brand Experience (0.783), Cultural Equity (0.849), and Brand Attachment (0.824) are higher than their respective correlations with other constructs (0.235, 0.584, and 0.193). This demonstrates that each construct is more closely related to its own indicators, which supports their distinctiveness.

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) test can be said to meet discriminant validity if the HTMT Ratio is less than 0.9 ($HTMT < 0.9$) to be declared to meet the discriminant validity criteria

Table 7. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Brand Experience	Cultural Equity	Brand Attachment
Brand Experience			
Cultural Equity	0,346		
Brand Attachment	0,783	0,136	0,684

According to the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) test results in Table 7, the HTMT values between Brand Experience and Cultural Equity (0.346), Brand Experience and Brand Attachment (0.783), and Cultural Equity and Brand Attachment (0.136) are all below the threshold of 0.9, which confirms the distinctiveness of these constructs.

Inner Model

The analysis of the inner model aims to evaluate the relationships between latent constructs. Structural model testing (i.e., the inner model) is conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in the SMART PLS application. The inner model can be evaluated using several indicators, one of which is the coefficient of determination (R^2).

R-Square

The results of structural model testing can be analyzed through the R-square value, which is part of the Goodness of Fit (GoF) evaluation. R-square represents the coefficient of determination for endogenous constructs. According to Chin (1998), an R-square value is considered strong if it reaches 0.67, moderate if it is 0.33, and weak if it is 0.19.

Table 7. *R-square*

	<i>R-square</i>	Keterangan
Cultural Equity	0.606	Moderat
Brand Attachment	0.563	Moderat

Based on Table 8, the R-square values for all three constructs brand experience (0.644), cultural equity (0.606), and brand attachment (0.563) are in the moderate range. This indicates that the structural model explains a significant, though incomplete, amount of variance in these constructs. These results imply that, although the model effectively captures the relationships between the constructs, it may require further refinement and the inclusion of additional predictors to enhance its explanatory power.

Path Coefisien Test

Hypothesis testing is divided into direct influence and indirect effect. Hypothesis testing in this study was carried out by looking at the T-Statistics value and the P-Values value. The research hypothesis can be declared accepted if the P-Values <0.05. The following (Table 8) are the results of hypothesis testing obtained in this study through the inner model.

Table 8. Results of hypothesis testing

Variabel	<i>Original Sample (O)</i>	<i>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</i>	<i>T Statistics (O/STDEV)</i>	<i>P Values</i>
Brand Experience -> Cultural Equity	0.803	0.037	21.559	0.000
Brand Experience -> Brand Attachment	0.779	0.031	24.733	0.000
Cultural Equity -> Brand Attachment	0.750	0.043	17.463	0.000
Brand Experience -> Cultural Equity -> Brand Attachment	0.729	0.040	18.308	0.000

The PLS-SEM analysis revealed a robust model in which brand experience is a fundamental driver of the consumer-brand relationship. The study's findings consistently support all of the proposed hypotheses, emphasizing the direct and indirect pathways connecting brand experience to deep emotional attachment. The results consistently emphasize the central role of brand experience as a primary driver. First, positive brand experience was found to significantly build cultural equity ($\beta = 0.803$; $t = 21.559$; $p = 0.000$). This confirms that well-designed interactions are the main medium through which brands instill cultural values and relevance in consumers' minds. Second, the direct path from brand experience to brand attachment showed a very strong influence ($\beta = 0.779$; $T = 24.733$; $p = 0.000$), validating that carefully crafted experiences can directly foster emotional bonds with the brand.

Furthermore, once cultural equity is established, it provides a solid foundation for fostering emotional attachment. Findings indicate that cultural equity significantly and positively influences brand attachment ($\beta = 0.750$; $T = 17.463$; $p = 0.000$). This suggests that consumers' emotional bond with a brand becomes stronger when they view it as a symbol of cultural relevance. Brands with a strong cultural identity are more likely to generate loyalty and long-term attachment. A key takeaway from this study is the mediating role of cultural equity. The indirect path from brand experience to brand attachment via cultural equity was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.729$; $t = 18.308$; $p = 0.000$). This highlights the dual role of brand experience. On the one hand, positive experiences directly create emotional attachment. On the other hand, the mediating findings reveal a deeper mechanism: brand experience also builds cultural equity, which then strengthens attachment. Therefore, while a pleasant experience alone is sufficient to

create attachment, experiences rich in cultural meaning lead to a deeper, more rooted emotional bond with the brand.

The PLS-SEM analysis reveals a robust model in which brand experience acts as a fundamental driver of the consumer-brand relationship. The strong direct effect of Brand Experience on Brand Attachment ($\beta = 0.779$; $p = 0.000$) confirms that the accumulation of positive, emotionally resonant interactions directly fosters emotional bonds. However, the most significant theoretical contribution of this study is the confirmation of Cultural Equity's role as a significant mediator (indirect $\beta = 0.729$; $p = 0.000$).

The results demonstrate a partial mediation effect. This partial mediation occurs because Brand Experience retains a significant direct impact on Brand Attachment, even after Cultural Equity is introduced into the model. This implies a dual pathway: local fashion brands can build emotional attachment directly through satisfying functional and emotional experiences (e.g., high-quality fabrics, excellent customer service), but they also simultaneously build attachment indirectly by cultivating a meaningful cultural identity. Experiences rich in local narratives and symbolism elevate the brand from a mere commodity to a cultural resource, thereby deepening the consumer's emotional roots to the brand. This partial mediation highlights that while a pleasant functional experience is foundational, injecting cultural meaning is what ultimately solidifies a sustainable, identity-driven attachment among Gen Z consumer.

CONCLUSION

The findings comprehensively support the proposed model, providing valuable insights for theory and brand management practices. The study confirms that brand experience is a strong antecedent that not only enhances brand attachment directly, but also significantly builds cultural equity. A key finding of this research is the critical role of cultural equity as a mediator. This suggests that positive brand experiences directly create emotional attachment, but their effect is strengthened and deepened when they successfully instill culturally relevant meaning for consumers. In other words, cultural equity acts as a psychological bridge that transforms functional and emotional interactions into a more meaningful attachment rooted in identity.

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches consumer-brand relationship literature by identifying and empirically validating cultural equity as a crucial mediating mechanism. It extends the existing understanding of how brand experiences are internalized into lasting attachment by demonstrating the process of cultural meaning-making. From a managerial standpoint, the implications are clear: To foster true loyalty and attachment, brand practitioners must do more than create enjoyable experiences. They should design touchpoints that build the brand's cultural narrative and symbolism strategically. The focus should shift from how consumers feel to the meaning of the experience for their identity and cultural world.

However, this study has several limitations. For example, it focuses on a specific cultural context or industry. Future research could examine this model across different countries or product categories to validate its generalizability. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how these relationships evolve over time. Investigating other antecedents of cultural equity or potential moderators of the mediation path would also be valuable.

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