Brand love unveiled: How KOL reviews and taste foster satisfaction and trust

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the effects of Key Opinion Leader (KOL) reviews and taste preferences on brand love, as well as their subsequent influence on brand satisfaction and trust. In an increasingly interconnected digital environment, KOL reviews and the compatibility between consumer preferences and product qualities are critical components in fostering emotional attachment to a brand. The study population comprised consumers of the Baby Dutch Pancake Restaurant. Purposive sampling was employed to identify respondents, with the requirement that customers be active on social media and have been exposed to reviews by KOLs. A total of 220 responses were collected through an online survey. The results indicate that KOL reviews and taste preferences exert a significant positive influence on brand love. Furthermore, brand love directly and positively affects both brand satisfaction and brand trust. The relationship between KOL reviews and taste preferences strengthens consumers' emotional attachment to the brand, resulting in higher satisfaction and trust. These findings suggest that integrating KOL reviews with consumer taste preferences is an effective strategy for enhancing loyalty and fostering long-term customer relationships. From a practical perspective, the results highlight the importance for brands to identify relevant KOLs and ensure that their products align with consumer preferences in order to create positive emotional experiences.

1.   Introduction

In a progressively interconnected digital age, the relationship between consumers and companies depends not only on product quality but also on the emotional experiences offered by the brand. The presence of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) significantly influences consumer opinions and actions, thereby strengthening the connection between brands and consumers. KOLs represent an effective digital marketing

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strategy, as they can enhance sales and foster a favourable corporate image (Cartwright et al., 2022). They also expedite information dissemination, increase brand visibility, and amplify the impact of word-of-mouth endorsements (Gao & Gu, 2024).

Brand love, or a strong emotional attachment to a brand, is another crucial factor in developing this emotional connection. Brand affinity serves as a strategic element in enhancing consumer loyalty and sustaining long-term trust. Aro et al. (2018) define brand love as a profound connection between customers and brands. Consumers who share this emotional bond tend to exhibit greater interest in and enthusiasm for the brand.

A Key Opinion Leader is recognised as an expert in a specific field and commands a large number of devoted followers. Their influence on consumer perceptions of a brand has become increasingly important. Reviews from KOLs, perceived as credible and trustworthy, shape customer perceptions and influence purchasing decisions. Also referred to as influencers, KOLs have become central to advertising efforts in the digital age. Ng et al. (2023) assert that KOLs represent a limited cohort of individuals who exert influence within specific domains. They hold key positions with extensive reach, facilitating the effective dissemination of information and perspectives. Consequently, their ability to influence consumers plays a vital role in building the emotional relationship known as brand love.

Consumer taste preferences, both literally and symbolically, also play an important role in determining their emotional connection to a brand. According to Pieniak et al. (2022), taste is a critical sense for evaluating consumed food, avoiding harmful substances, and preparing the body for digestion. When taste satisfies consumer expectations, it contributes to the formation of a profound attachment, commonly referred to as brand love. Furthermore, brand love mediates the relationship between brand trust, resistance to negative information, and repurchase intentions (Gultekin & Turgut, 2015). Ultimately, brand love fosters consumer loyalty and increases the likelihood of repeat purchases.

Nikhashemi et al. (2019) posited that brand love serves as a robust predictor of consumer behaviour, suggesting that after consumption, individuals are likely to share and recommend the product brand. Brand satisfaction can also be cultivated, as brand-loyal customers are generally more likely to feel satisfied with the products provided. According to Susanti et al. (2021), brand satisfaction occurs when customers believe that the product they receive from the brand meets their expectations, resulting in feelings of happiness after use. Furthermore, brand love influences brand trust. Brand trust reflects a significant commitment that fosters strong relationships between brands and consumers (Sarantidou, 2018). According to Han et al. (2015), when consumers trust a brand, they believe in its quality and feel reassured about the brand's reliability.

The relationship between brand satisfaction and brand trust is reciprocal. Brand satisfaction refers to consumers' favourable perceptions of a specific brand, which emerge from evaluating various factors such as product quality, type, price, ease of use, and the likelihood of meeting customer expectations (Yohanna & Ruslim, 2021). Consistent brand satisfaction serves as the foundation of brand trust. Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán (2005) define brand trust as the belief that a company will consistently fulfil its commitment to delivering value to customers throughout all stages of the process, including creation, production, sales, service, and marketing, even under challenging circumstances.

However, the relationship between KOL reviews, taste, brand love, brand satisfaction, and brand trust remains inadequately explored. This study investigates the roles of KOL reviews and taste preferences in fostering brand love and examines their subsequent effects on consumer satisfaction and trust. The findings offer academic insights into the connections among these variables and provide strategic guidance for brands aiming to develop more effective marketing strategies that foster emotional connections with consumers. This approach aims to advance marketing theory and practice in contemporary contexts.

2. Literature review

2.1 KOLs' review

KOLs' ability to influence their followers is shaped by several factors, including scarcity, authority, likability, social proof, commitment and consistency, and reciprocity (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). According to this framework, KOLs can sway customer choices by leveraging their authority, social proof, and personal identification with consumers. Due to their knowledge, experience, or dominant position in a particular industry, KOLs are typically regarded as trustworthy information sources and have a significant impact on purchase decisions (Tuti, 2025).

A KOL is generally recognised as an opinion leader—often a well-known figure in a specific industry—who offers detailed and accurate product information to earn the trust of their target audience (Meng, 2023). Casaló et al. (2020) define a KOL as an individual who influences the decisions, attitudes, and behaviours of others through their knowledge and expertise. Similarly, Zhao and Kong (2017) highlight the significance of the KOL concept in social media marketing, where such individuals actively share ideas and capture attention within digital communities. The identification of KOLs has become increasingly important, as they hold considerable power to shape public opinion. The position they occupy within a network plays a critical role. Jin et al. (2023) emphasise that KOLs act as reputable third parties who possess appeal and credibility within their domains, enabling them to influence the decisions of their followers. Additionally, KOL characteristics are often classified into dimensions such as familiarity, trustworthiness, and expertise (Xiong et al., 2021).

Access to data held by a KOL is essential for brands aiming to engage with their followers, as such data offers valuable insights into audience preferences, needs, and behaviours. KOLs are often regarded as objective in evaluating products, which enhances their credibility. Their ability to provide engaging information and recommendations positions them as informed individuals who remain aligned with contemporary trends and developments. However, selecting an appropriate KOL presents a challenge. Lam et al. (2024) assert that identifying the most suitable KOL requires evaluating factors such as competence in a specific industry, experience in digital marketing, personal attributes, message dissemination channels, and levels of customer engagement. Positive endorsements from KOLs can significantly increase followers' willingness to try a brand.

Interactions initiated by KOLs contribute to the development of favourable perceptions of brand affinity. Brand love represents a unique type of relationship between consumers and brands, characterised by specific attributes (Rauschnabel et al., 2024). According to Alshreef et al. (2023), brand love depends on the likelihood of customers choosing a brand when they experience a strong emotional connection with it. KOL reviews that successfully foster brand affinity enhance consumer loyalty, even in highly competitive market environments. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H1: KOL influences brand love

2.2 Taste

Taste is a multi-sensory experience that involves not only the mouth but also the nose, ears, eyes, and hands (Strong, 2022). Guedes et al. (2023) state that taste is a combination of sensations derived from both smell and taste. It encompasses various food attributes, including flavour, aroma, mouthfeel, texture, temperature, and auditory sensations during mastication. According to Breslin (2013), taste is the primary sense that helps individuals determine the nutritional value of the food they consume. Taste plays a significant role in customer acceptance and the effectiveness of product marketing. If food lacks flavour and creative presentation, its nutritional value alone will not drive sales. According to Drummond and Brefere (2010), relevant indicators of this variable include taste, smell, appearance, and texture.

Taste is a sensory experience perceived by the tongue, encompassing categories such as sour, salty, sweet, savoury, and bitter. The sensory attributes of these components influence the consumer experience during the consumption of a dish. Furthermore, taste reflects consumers' preferences and their inclination to select products associated with a particular brand. Consequently, businesses must optimise flavour across all products they offer. Consistency in taste can help establish brand love, as it is one of the most effective ways to create emotional closeness between customers and brands. Ismuroji et al. (2023) define brand love as a consumer response to a brand's perceived appropriateness, which can foster loyalty. Taste may leave an indelible impression, especially for products where taste serves as the primary value proposition. This relationship forms the foundation for building a strong connection between consumers and brands, ultimately facilitating long-term brand sustainability.

Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Taste influences brand love

2.3   Brand love

Brand love is an emerging concept that emotionally and interpersonally connects customers with brands, resulting in a strong bond between the two (Kang, 2015). Ferreira et al. (2019) assert that brand love constitutes a positive emotion indicative of attachment to a cherished object. Miwa et al. (2023) further explain that brand love serves as an intermediary in the relationship between innovation and consumer behavioural intentions. Similarly, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) describe brand love as a significant emotional connection experienced by consumers who are satisfied with a specific brand. According to Batra et al. (2012), brand love reflects the affection consumers show when expressing a preference for a particular brand or product. Wang et al. (2023) identify five key indicators that influence brand love: affinity, experience, pride, loyalty, and reputation.

Brand love represents a strong attachment to a product or service that arises from positive experiences. Typically, it develops through a sustained relationship between consumers and brands (Anim-Wright & Amartey, 2024). Over time, consumers may even perceive the brand as part of their lifestyle. Brand love fosters loyalty, reducing the likelihood of consumers switching to alternative brands. Joshi and Garg (2021) highlight the importance for businesses to understand that brand loyalty evolves gradually. Furthermore, brand love is expected to improve the understanding and prediction of consumer behaviour following product consumption (Hsu & Chen, 2018).

Consumers who adore a brand's product often report positive experiences and increased brand satisfaction. Brand affection enhances satisfaction when the brand consistently meets its promises and obligations to consumers. Consistency and dependability strengthen brand satisfaction. Chinomona et al. (2013) define brand satisfaction as cumulative satisfaction based on consumers' overall evaluations of their purchases and experiences with a product or service. Fostering brand affection not only contributes to brand satisfaction but also strengthens brand trust. According to Haudi et al. (2022), brand trust represents a consumer relationship built on feelings of security and confidence in the brand's ability to meet their needs and interests. Brand trust, cultivated through brand affection, promotes repeat purchases and enhances market competitiveness.

Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Brand love affects brand satisfaction
H4: Brand love affects brand trust

2.4   Brand satisfaction and brand trust

According to Susanti et al. (2021), brand satisfaction occurs when customers believe that the brand delivers on their expectations, whether through its products or services. This generates a sense of satisfaction among consumers while engaging with the brand. Chen-Yu et al. (2017) assert that brand satisfaction is a behavioural outcome arising from consumer engagement with a brand. It considers customers holistically, taking into account total purchases and interactions with a particular brand. Furthermore, brand satisfaction fundamentally depends on the comparison between consumers' actual experiences with a product and their expectations (Chen et al., 2020). It is typically measured through equity, value, and quality (Erciş et al., 2012).

Brand satisfaction reflects a reaction or feeling of contentment that emerges after consumers interact with a product or service that meets or exceeds their expectations. Satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the brand to others, which reinforces its reliability. When consumers are satisfied, it demonstrates the brand's ability to meet their expectations, thereby strengthening brand trust. Brand trust refers to the brand's capacity to fulfil consumer needs and deliver on its promises (Margaretha & Rodhiah, 2021). This trust instils confidence in consumers that the brand will continue to provide equivalent or superior quality in the future, further reinforcing its position in the market.

The degree of confidence that consumers have in a brand is shaped by their perception of whether the product will deliver on its promise (Tuti & Sulistia, 2022). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as consumers' general willingness to rely on the brand to fulfil its obligations. However, brand trust also entails a process that is methodical and deliberate. Wang and Wang (2024) describe brand trust as customer confidence in a brand, even in situations of uncertainty or limited information, where consumers still believe the brand can provide products and services that meet their expectations. Indicators relevant to this discussion include the brand's reputation for reliability, consistency in providing excellent service, and respect for customers (Ndubisi, 2007).

Brand trust reflects the level of consumer confidence established through positive experiences, a strong reputation, and a perceived sense of security during consumption. Consumer trust can significantly impact brand value, as it has the potential to both enhance and diminish it. Building brand trust requires maintaining consistency and fostering confidence. Businesses must ensure robust stability across key dimensions, including price, performance, and value (Alhaddad, 2015).

Brand trust is critical, as consumers' purchasing decisions are often influenced by their confidence in a brand (Hung et al., 2023). Furthermore, it reflects the extent to which consumers believe a brand adheres to its guiding principles. In addition to influencing purchase decisions, brand trust also shapes consumer behaviour and assists marketers in improving brand performance (Sharma & Paudel, 2018).

Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

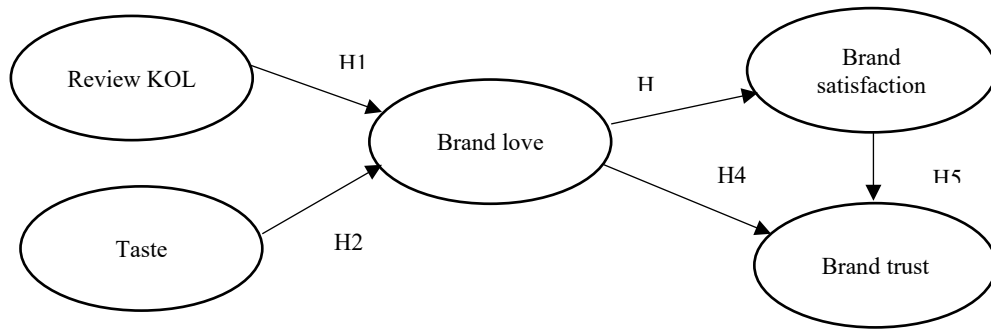*H5: Brand satisfaction affects brand trust*

Figure 1: Research framework

3. Methodology

The study population comprised consumers who made purchases at the Baby Dutch Pancake Restaurant. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed by the researcher in November 2024 at the restaurant. A total of 220 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which involved identifying participants based on criteria established by the researcher (Sugiyono, 2019). The criteria specified that respondents must be active social media users and have been exposed to KOL reviews of specific products.

Baby Dutch Pancake Restaurant is renowned for its thin, crispy, and soft Dutch pancakes. These pancakes are served with a variety of sweet and savoury toppings. Options range from sweet varieties topped with chocolate, fruit, and cheese to savoury selections featuring eggs, meat, and vegetables, making them popular among visitors of all ages. Typically thinner than standard pancakes, they offer a unique combination of crispy and soft textures, creating a distinct dining experience. Additionally, the restaurant frequently offers various breakfast items and snacks, making it an ideal spot for brunch, lunch, or breakfast gatherings with friends and family.

In this study, measurements were conducted using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree," 2 "disagree," 3 "neutral," 4 "agree," and 5 "strongly agree." Several instruments were used to measure the study variables. KOL (Key Opinion Leader) reviews were assessed using three main indicators: familiarity, trustworthiness, and expertise (Xiong et al., 2021). The taste dimension was evaluated based on four indicators: taste, smell, appearance, and texture (Drummond & Brefere, 2010). Brand love was measured using five indicators: affinity, experience, pride, loyalty, and reputation (Wang et al., 2023). Brand satisfaction was assessed using three items adapted from Erciş et al. (2012): equity, value, and quality. Additionally, brand trust was measured using indicators related to the brand's reliability, consistency in delivering quality service, and respect for customers (Ndubisi, 2007).

The data analysis was conducted using a structural equation model (SEM) with SmartPLS software. The analysis process began with testing the validity and reliability of the model, followed by assessments of discriminant validity, multicollinearity, the F-test, the R-test, and the SRMR test. Finally, hypothesis testing was performed by comparing the t-test results with a threshold value of 1.96 and ensuring a probability value of less than 0.05 to confirm the significance of the effects.

4. Results

4.1 Demographics

The respondents in this study were individuals who actively use social media and have experience with brands that have been reviewed by Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs). They were also consumers with an interest in products or services related to the categories examined in this research. The characteristics of the respondents are presented as follows.

Table 1. Respondents profile

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Man	76	65.5
Woman	144	34.5
Age		
< 20 years	26	11.8
21-30 years	167	75.9
31-40 years	25	11.4
41-50 years	2	0.9
> 50 years	-	-
Status		
Students	67	30.5
Housewife	29	13.2
Private employees	97	44.1
Other	27	12.3
Place of Origin		
South Jakarta	63	28.6
North Jakarta	41	18.6
East Jakarta	37	16.8
West Jakarta	28	12.7
Outside Jakarta	51	23.2
Previous Dining Experience		
Yes	200	90.9
No	20	9.1
Resources		
Social media	88	40
Friend	69	31.4
Family	35	15.9
Other	28	12.7
Top Reasons to Visit		
Product Quality	95	43.2
Atmosphere	58	26.4
Location	29	13.2
Other	38	17.3
KOL Who Informs		
Bigtummy Culinary	53	24.1
Jajanbeken	58	26.4
Agakenyang	35	15.9
Kenandgrat	74	33.6
How Many Times Visited		
< Once a Week	23	10.5
Once a Week	40	18.2
Once a Month	73	33.2
Once every 2 months	84	38.2
Total	220	100

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents were female, totalling 144 individuals (65.5%). The largest age group was 21–30 years old, with 167 respondents (75.9%). Additionally, 97 respondents (44.1%) were private employees. A total of 63 respondents (28.6%) resided in South Jakarta. Furthermore,

200 respondents (90.9%) had previously heard of the Baby Dutch Pancake Restaurant. In terms of information sources, 88 respondents (40%) reported discovering the restaurant through social media. Regarding visit motivation, 95 respondents (43.2%) stated that product quality influenced their decision to visit. Kenandgrat was identified as the most popular KOL identified by the respondents (33.6%). Finally, 84 respondents (38.2%) reported visiting the restaurant once every two months.
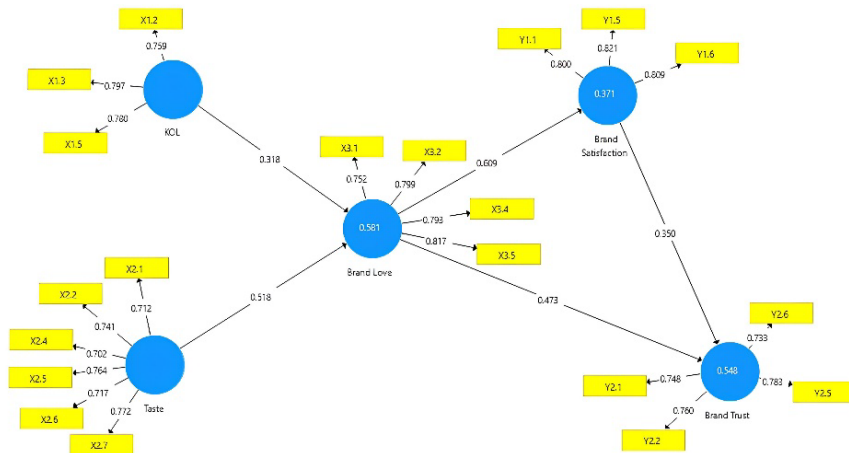
4.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

Figure 2: Structural model

An indicator is considered to have convergent validity in the good category if the outer loading value is more than 0.5. Therefore, it can be said that there is no variable indicator that produces an outer loading value of less than 0.5 based on the information in Figure 2. After each indicator is considered feasible or valid, the indicator can be used for further research and application.

Table 2. Evaluation of measurement model

Variable	Loading Factor	Reliability	Ave
KOL Review (Xiong et al., 2021)	0.759 0.797 0.780	0.822	0.607
Taste (Drummond & Brefere, 2010)	0.712 0.741 0.702 0.764 0.717 0.772	0.876	0.540
Brand Love (Wang et al., 2023)	0.752 0.799 0.793 0.817	0.870	0.625
Brand Satisfaction (Erciş et al., 2012)	0.800 0.821 0.809	0.851	0.656

Variable	Loading Factor	Reliability	Ave
Brand Trust (Ndubisi, 2007)	0.748	0.842	0.572
	0.760		
	0.783		
	0.733		

Table 2 shows that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for each indicator variable can be used to assess discriminant validity, alongside the cross-loading values. To establish a good model, the AVE value should exceed 0.5. Based on the data in Table 2, the AVE values for the KOL review, taste, brand love, brand satisfaction, and brand trust variables all meet this criterion, with values above 0.5. This indicates that each variable demonstrates strong discriminant validity.

Table 3. Discriminant validity

Variable	Brand love	Brand satisfaction	Brand trust	KOL review	Taste
Brand love	0.791				
Brand satisfaction	0.609	0.810			
Brand trust	0.686	0.638	0.756		
KOL review	0.651	0.552	0.577	0.779	
Taste	0.722	0.646	0.685	0.642	0.735

Table 3 shows that each indicator statement has a maximum loading value for its respective latent construct. This condition must be met for the indicators to be considered valid. In addition, discriminant validity is clearly demonstrated, as the square root of each AVE value is greater than the correlations with other constructs.

Multicollinearity was tested using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) parameter, which in this study was limited to 5.0. Based on the results presented in Table 3, the variables brand love (0.791), brand satisfaction (0.810), brand trust (0.756), KOL review (0.766), and taste (0.735) each recorded the highest loading values for their respective constructs. These findings indicate that there is no multicollinearity issue, thus allowing the analysis to proceed.

Table 4. R-Square values

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Brand love	0.581	0.577
Brand satisfaction	0.371	0.368
Brand trust	0.548	0.544

To evaluate the influence of exogenous variables on endogenous variables, the R-Square (R²) value is used. Table 4 shows that the R² values for brand love, brand satisfaction, and brand trust are 0.577, 0.368, and 0.544, respectively. This indicates that brand love, brand satisfaction, and brand trust are influenced by KOL reviews and taste by 57.7%, 36.8%, and 54.4%, respectively. The remaining percentages are attributed to variables not included in this study.

Table 5. F-square data

Variables	F Square
KOL Review (X1) → Brand Love (X3)	0.142
Taste (X2) → Brand Love (X3)	0.377
Brand Love (X3) → Brand Satisfaction (Y1)	0.589
Brand Love (X3) → Brand Trust (Y2)	0.312
Brand Satisfaction (Y1) → Brand Trust (Y2)	0.170

The F-square test is used to measure the strength of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. According to standard guidelines, an F-square value greater than 0.02 indicates a small effect, a value above 0.15 indicates a moderate effect, and a value above 0.35 indicates a large effect. Table 5 presents the construct model results, showing medium effect sizes for brand satisfaction on brand trust and brand love on brand trust, with F-square values of 0.170 and 0.312, respectively. The relationship between KOL reviews and brand love reflects a small effect, with an F-square value of 0.142. In contrast, the relationships between taste and brand love, and between brand love and brand satisfaction, demonstrate large effects, with F-square values of 0.377 and 0.589, respectively.

Table 6. Multicollinearity Results – Inner VIF Values

Variable	Brand Love	Brand Satisfaction	Brand Trust	KOL Review	Taste
Brand love		1,000	1,589		
Brand satisfaction			1,589		
Brand trust					
KOL review	1,700				
Taste	1,700				

Based on the VIF values, multicollinearity between constructs was assessed. Table 6 shows that the VIF values in this study range from 1.000 to 1.700, which do not exceed the threshold of 5.0. These results indicate that multicollinearity is not a concern and, therefore, does not pose a barrier to further analysis of this topic.

Table 7. Prediction Accuracy Test (Q2)

	SSO	SSE	Q2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Brand love	880,000	568,917	0.354
Brand satisfaction	660,000	503,561	0.237
Brand trust	880,000	612,971	0.303
Kol review	660,000	660,000	
Taste	1,320,000	1,320,000	

The Q² value can be used to assess prediction accuracy. If the Q² value is greater than zero, the model is considered to have high prediction accuracy; if it is less than zero, the model is considered to have low prediction accuracy. As shown in the table above, the Q² values in this study range from 0.237 to 0.354, indicating that all variables demonstrate high prediction accuracy.

Table 8. Path Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Results
Brand Love → Brand Satisfaction	0.609	0.611	0.051	11,847	0,000	Accepted
Brand Love → Brand Trust	0.473	0.474	0.056	8,381	0,000	Accepted
Brand Satisfaction → Brand Trust	0.350	0.349	0.059	5,910	0,000	Accepted
KOL Review → Brand Love	0.318	0.321	0.063	5,074	0,000	Accepted
Taste → Brand Love	0.518	0.518	0.064	8,087	0,000	Accepted

A hypothesis can be accepted if the p-value is less than 0.05 and the path coefficient's t-statistic exceeds 1.96. As shown in Table 8, all tested hypotheses in this study meet these criteria. The relationship between brand love and brand satisfaction is supported, with a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05) and a t-statistic of 11.847 (>1.96), indicating a strong and significant effect. Likewise, brand love significantly influences brand trust, as evidenced by a t-statistic of 8.381 (>1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05). The hypothesis linking brand satisfaction to brand trust is also accepted, supported by a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05) and a t-statistic of 5.910 (>1.96), confirming a positive relationship. Furthermore, KOL reviews are found to significantly influence brand love, demonstrated by a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05) and a t-statistic of 5.074 (>1.96). Finally, taste has a strong and positive effect on brand love, as shown by a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05) and a t-statistic of 8.087 (>1.96). Collectively, these results confirm that all hypothesised relationships are statistically significant and positively contribute to the proposed model.

5. Discussion

Credible, informative, and authentic evaluations from Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) can strengthen consumers' emotional connections to a brand. Influencer reviews play a crucial role in fostering brand love, as recommendations from well-known, influential, and relevant KOLs are more likely to be trusted by consumers. This aligns with Kotler and Keller (2012), who contend that emotional connections to brands are most strongly shaped by endorsements from reputable third parties. Supporting this view, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that positive brand reviews shared by social media influencers increase consumers' emotional investment in the products they purchase. Accordingly, KOLs contribute significantly to building deeper emotional relationships through the trust and intimacy they offer.

In addition to KOL influence, taste preferences also significantly impact brand loyalty. As personal flavour preferences vary widely, taste becomes a critical factor in consumers' meal choices (Puputti et al., 2019). Customers tend to be more loyal to brands that consistently meet their taste expectations. Consistent with the hedonic consumption hypothesis proposed by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), these findings suggest that enjoyable sensory experiences can foster stronger emotional connections with brands and products. Similarly, Iglesias et al. (2011) observed that consumers' desire for pleasurable experiences can deepen brand affection. In this context, taste influences not only consumer satisfaction but also their emotional attachment to the brand.

The study also reveals that brand love has a significant positive relationship with brand satisfaction. According to Roy et al. (2013), a strong and positive association with a brand encourages long-term commitment and devotion. Consumers with deep affection for a brand are more likely to make repeat purchases and overlook minor product or service flaws. This observation is consistent with Carroll and

Ahuvia (2006), who identified brand love as a primary predictor of brand satisfaction. Furthermore, Albert and Merunka (2013) noted that brand love enhances consumer loyalty and strengthens brand relationships, which ultimately contributes to overall satisfaction.

Finally, the relationship between brand love and brand trust is also found to be significant. Brand loyalty often correlates with increased consumer trust in product quality and perceived value. Trust, which is vital for long-term consumer–brand relationships, is reinforced by the presence of brand love, as suggested by Morgan and Hunt (1994). This is further supported by Batra et al. (2012), who demonstrate that a robust emotional bond can enhance trust, even in competitive markets. Additionally, Beyaz and Gungor (2021) describe brand satisfaction as the consumer's response to receiving products or services that meet expectations. The findings indicate that satisfied customers are more likely to place their trust in a brand, thereby reinforcing loyalty and commitment.

6.   Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Key Opinion Leader (KOL) reviews and taste preferences significantly influence brand love, which in turn positively impacts brand satisfaction and brand trust. The findings highlight that KOL reviews and taste function as strategic components in fostering emotional connections with consumers, with brand love serving as a key mediator that strengthens brand satisfaction and trust. These insights offer valuable guidance for brands in developing effective marketing strategies aimed at enhancing consumer loyalty.

This research enhances the theory of brand love, brand satisfaction, and brand trust by incorporating key opinion leaders and taste preferences as important factors affecting consumer-brand relationships. Thus, it provides a novel conceptual framework that can be used in future research about tactics for creating emotional ties with customers.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any financial benefits and declare the absence of conflicting interests with any institution.

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Authors' contributions

Delia Novitasari contributed to the conceptualisation of the research model, conducted the questionnaire survey, analysed the data, and prepared the manuscript. Melyani Tuti provided supervision, assisted with translation, and was responsible for reviewing and revising the final version of the article.

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