

The Role of Storytelling, E-WOM, and Brand Experience in Shaping Brand Engagement and Brand Equity Among Generation Z Consumers

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of storytelling, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and brand experience on brand engagement and their subsequent impact on brand equity among Generation Z consumers of Skintific skincare products in Malang City. The study contributes to the branding literature by focusing on Generation Z consumers of Skintific, one of the rapidly growing skincare brands in Indonesia. A quantitative approach was employed, and data were collected from 115 Generation Z consumers of Skintific skincare products in Malang City using a purposive sampling technique. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The findings indicate that storytelling has a positive and significant effect on brand engagement. Brand experience also exerts a positive and significant influence on brand engagement. In contrast, e-WOM does not significantly affect brand engagement. Furthermore, brand engagement positively and significantly influences brand equity. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that skincare marketers should prioritize compelling brand narratives and meaningful brand experiences to strengthen consumer engagement and enhance brand equity among Generation Z consumers. This study enriches the understanding of brand-building strategies in the Indonesian skincare industry by highlighting the critical role of storytelling and brand experience in fostering brand engagement and strengthening brand equity.

ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti pengaruh storytelling, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), dan pengalaman merek terhadap keterlibatan merek dan dampaknya

terhadap ekuitas merek di kalangan konsumen Generasi Z produk perawatan kulit Skintific di Kota Malang. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur branding dengan berfokus pada konsumen Generasi Z Skintific, salah satu merek perawatan kulit yang berkembang pesat di Indonesia. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan, dan data dikumpulkan dari 115 konsumen Generasi Z produk perawatan kulit Skintific di Kota Malang menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Data dianalisis menggunakan Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) dengan perangkat lunak SmartPLS. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa storytelling memiliki pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keterlibatan merek. Pengalaman merek juga memberikan pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keterlibatan merek. Sebaliknya, e-WOM tidak secara signifikan memengaruhi keterlibatan merek. Lebih lanjut, keterlibatan merek secara positif dan signifikan memengaruhi ekuitas merek. Dari perspektif praktis, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemasar perawatan kulit harus memprioritaskan narasi merek yang menarik dan pengalaman merek yang bermakna untuk memperkuat keterlibatan konsumen dan meningkatkan ekuitas merek di kalangan konsumen Generasi Z. Studi ini memperkaya pemahaman tentang strategi membangun merek di industri perawatan kulit Indonesia dengan menyoroti peran penting penceritaan (storytelling) dan pengalaman merek dalam mendorong keterlibatan merek dan memperkuat ekuitas merek.



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INTRODUCTION

The skincare industry in Indonesia has grown rapidly alongside increasing public awareness of skin health as a central component of contemporary lifestyle. Products such as sunscreen, serums, and moisturisers are no longer perceived solely in functional terms; they have become vehicles for self-expression and confidence enhancement. As a result, purchasing decisions are increasingly driven by psychological and emotional associations attached to a brand (Khaerunisa & Husain, 2025). Within this context, brands serve not merely as product identifiers but as strategic assets for forging enduring consumer relationships (Lubis, 2025).

These behavioural shifts have unfolded alongside rapid digital transformation, which has reshaped the competitive dynamics of the skincare sector. Indonesia's skincare market value is projected to reach USD 9.74 billion in 2025 with a steady growth trajectory (Warta Ekonomi, 2025). The expanding number of cosmetic producers has intensified inter-brand competition, while the proliferation of digital marketing activities has broadened the touchpoints through which consumers and brands interact on social media and e-commerce platforms.

Navigating this intensely competitive environment requires brands to cultivate brand engagement as a strategic priority. Skintific has demonstrated notable commercial strength by securing the leading position in Indonesia's skincare market share (VRITIMES, 2025). This achievement reflects not only robust sales performance but also the formation of consumer engagement through digital interaction, trust, and responsiveness to brand communication (Hollebeek et al., 2014). The competitive landscape is illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Top-Selling Skincare Brand Rankings in Indonesia, 2025

Rank	Skincare Brand	Market Share (%)
1	Skintific	10.1
2	Elformula	6.1
3	The Originote	4.1
4	Y.O.U	4.0
5	Somethinc	3.4

Source: VRITIMES (2025)

The engagement observed among Skintific consumers is attributed to the brand's digital marketing strategies. Communication approaches such as storytelling, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and brand experience function as stimuli that shape consumer involvement. Storytelling enables narrative and emotionally resonant message delivery that facilitates consumer comprehension (Lundqvist et al., 2013). E-WOM exerts influence through peer-to-peer experience sharing, shaping brand perceptions and trust (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Brand experience captures the tangible interactions consumers have with a brand, generating cognitive and emotional responses (Brakus et al., 2009).

Previous studies have generally reported that storytelling, e-WOM, and brand experience contribute positively to brand engagement. Storytelling helps strengthen emotional connections and consumer involvement with brands (Chiu, 2021; Dessart & Pitardi, 2019). Likewise, e-WOM facilitates consumer engagement through credible peer-generated information and recommendations (Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2021). Brand experience has also been identified as a key driver of consumer engagement because memorable interactions foster emotional attachment and active participation (Fikri et al., 2020; Syamsuddin & Fadhilla, 2024). Furthermore, brand engagement has been shown to enhance brand equity by strengthening brand awareness, brand associations, and consumer loyalty (Minh et al., 2022; Tanamal et al., 2022).

Despite these generally positive findings, previous studies have reported inconsistent results. While storytelling is often associated with stronger brand engagement, its effectiveness may decline when consumers perceive brand narratives as irrelevant or inauthentic (van Laer et al., 2019). Similarly, although e-WOM is widely recognized as a powerful source of influence, its impact depends heavily on information credibility and relevance, resulting in varying outcomes across consumer contexts (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Brand experience also does not always generate meaningful engagement, particularly when consumers perceive interactions as routine or lacking differentiation. These inconsistencies suggest that the relationships among storytelling, e-WOM, brand experience, and brand engagement remain context-dependent and warrant further investigation.

This study adopts Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Theory as its theoretical foundation, which posits that brand value emerges from consumers' cognitive and emotional responses to marketing stimuli (Keller, 2013). Within this framework, storytelling, electronic word of mouth

(e-WOM), and brand experience serve as marketing stimuli that shape consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and emotional connections with a brand. Brand engagement is viewed as a critical mechanism through which these marketing stimuli are translated into stronger brand equity. Consumers who are cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally engaged with a brand tend to develop stronger brand associations, greater loyalty, and more favourable brand evaluations, all of which contribute to the formation of sustainable brand equity (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Rather et al., 2022). Accordingly, this study positions brand engagement as a mediating variable linking storytelling, e-WOM, and brand experience to brand equity within the CBBE framework.

The study focuses on Generation Z as the principal consumer segment in the skincare industry because this cohort is highly exposed to digital content, actively engages with social media platforms, and tends to evaluate brands based on authenticity, peer recommendations, and experiential value (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). These characteristics make Generation Z particularly responsive to storytelling, e-WOM, and brand experience compared with previous generations. Furthermore, although Skintific has emerged as one of the leading skincare brands in Indonesia, empirical evidence regarding the mechanisms through which these marketing factors influence brand engagement and brand equity among Generation Z consumers remains limited. Malang City was selected as the research site owing to its dominant Generation Z demographic and high levels of skincare consumption. Previous research further confirmed that the majority of Skintific users in Malang City are young, digitally active consumers (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

This study differs from previous research in several respects. First, it integrates storytelling, e-WOM, and brand experience within a single framework to examine their relative influence on brand engagement. Second, it positions brand engagement as a mediating mechanism linking digital marketing stimuli to brand equity within the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework. Third, unlike many previous studies that have examined these relationships across broader consumer groups or different product categories, this study focuses specifically on Generation Z consumers of Skintific, a rapidly growing skincare brand in Indonesia that has received limited scholarly attention despite its strong market performance. Based on the foregoing, this study aims to analyse the influence of storytelling, e-WOM, and brand experience on brand engagement, and the subsequent impact on brand equity among Generation Z consumers of Skintific in Malang City. The findings are expected to contribute to theoretical discourse on digital marketing and consumer behaviour while offering practical guidance to skincare practitioners seeking to design more effective marketing communication strategies.

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory quantitative research design to examine the relationships among storytelling, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), brand experience, brand engagement, and brand equity among Generation Z consumers of Skintific skincare products in Malang City. The explanatory approach was used to test and explain the causal relationships among variables based on established theoretical foundations (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

The population consisted of Generation Z consumers of Skintific skincare products residing in Malang City. Generation Z is generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012; however, this study focused on respondents aged 17–29 years who met the established sampling criteria. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling because respondents were required to meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria included: (1) belonging to Generation Z, which in this study refers to respondents aged 17–29 years, (2) having purchased Skintific skincare products at least three times, and (3) residing in Malang City.

Since the exact population size was unknown, the minimum sample size was determined using the guideline proposed by Malhotra (2009), which recommends a sample size of five to ten times the number of indicators used in the research model. This study employed 23 indicators; therefore, the minimum sample size required was 115 respondents (23×5). A total of 115 valid responses were collected and analyzed.

The research model consists of five latent variables, namely storytelling (X1), electronic word of mouth (X2), brand experience (X3), brand engagement (Y1), and brand equity (Y2). Storytelling refers to consumers' perception of brand communication through narrative content that builds emotional connection, attractiveness, and credibility, and is reflected through the dimensions of authenticity, uniqueness, emotional appeal, credibility, and aesthetic judgment (Armus et al., 2025). Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to consumers' perception of online reviews, comments, and recommendations regarding a product, which is reflected through information quality, source credibility, relevance, completeness, and valence opinion (Murti et al., 2024; Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2021). Brand experience refers to subjective consumer responses when interacting with a brand, encompassing sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual dimensions (Brakus et al., 2009). Brand engagement refers to the level of consumer involvement and interaction with a brand, reflected through enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction (Minh et al., 2022). Brand equity refers to the perceived value and strength of a brand compared to competing brands, which is represented by brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and recognition (Sasabilah et al., 2024; Syamsuddin & Fadhillah, 2024).

Table 2. Operational Definition of Variables

Variable	Dimensions	Measurement Items	Source
Storytelling (X1)	Authenticity	Skintific storytelling is delivered honestly.	Armus et al. (2025)
	Uniqueness	The storytelling is different from similar brands.	
	Emotional Appeal	The content creates positive feelings in me.	
	Credibility	I trust the information in the storytelling content.	
	Aesthetic Judgment	The content looks visually attractive.	
Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)	Information Quality	Reviews explain products clearly.	Murti et al., (2024); Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan (2021)
	Source Credibility	I trust user reviews.	
	Relevance	Reviews match my needs.	
	Completeness	Reviews provide detailed information.	
	Valence Opinion	Positive reviews increase my confidence.	
Brand Experience (X3)	Sensory	Skintific visuals attract my attention.	Brakus et al. (2009)
	Affective	I feel happy when seeing or using Skintific.	
	Behavioral	I am encouraged to try the product.	

Variable	Dimensions	Measurement Items	Source
Brand Engagement (Y1)	Intellectual	I am interested in searching for information.	Minh et al. (2022)
	Enthusiasm	I feel enthusiastic about Skintific.	
	Attention	I pay attention to Skintific information.	
	Absorption	I feel absorbed in the content.	
	Interaction	I interact with Skintific on social media.	
Brand Equity (Y2)	Brand Awareness	I can easily recall Skintific.	Sasabilah et al., (2024); Syamsuddin & Fadhilla (2024)
	Brand Association	I have a positive impression of Skintific.	
	Perceived Quality	I perceive Skintific as high quality.	
	Brand Loyalty	Skintific is my preferred brand.	
	Recognition	Skintific is easily recognized among skincare brands.	

Source: Compiled from various references (2025-2026)

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Because all variables were measured using self-reported questionnaires, several procedural measures were implemented to minimize the potential for common method bias. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary, responses would remain anonymous and confidential, and there were no right or wrong answers. In addition, common method bias was assessed using the full collinearity approach, where variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 3.3 indicate that common method bias is unlikely to threaten the validity of the findings (Kock, 2015).

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for predicting and explaining relationships among multiple latent variables simultaneously, accommodates relatively small sample sizes, and does not require strict assumptions of multivariate normality (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis was conducted in two stages: outer model evaluation and inner model evaluation. The outer model was assessed through convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Indicators were considered valid when outer loading values exceeded 0.70 and AVE values were greater than 0.50, while composite reliability values above 0.70 indicated satisfactory reliability. The inner model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Hypothesis testing was performed using the bootstrapping procedure, and hypotheses were accepted when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was below 0.05 (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

The demographic profile of respondents was analysed to contextualise the findings, given that individual characteristics may influence perceptions of brand communication, product use experiences, and consumer engagement. The characteristics examined included gender, age, domicile, educational background, occupational status, monthly usage frequency, duration of product use, income level, and primary platform for viewing Skintific advertisements. These are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	56	39.44%
	Female	86	60.56%
Age	17-20 Years	15	10.56%
	21-23 Years	66	46.48%
	24-26 Years	61	42.96%
Domicile	Lowokwaru	41	28.87%
	Blimbing	24	16.90%
	Sukun	28	19.72%
	Kedungkandang	28	19.72%
Education	Klojen	21	14.79%
	SMA/SMK	31	21.83%
	Diploma	15	10.56%
	Bachelor's (S1)	96	67.61%
Occupation	High School Student	9	6.34%
	University Student	60	42.25%
	Working Student	13	9.15%
	Private Employee	37	26.06%
	Entrepreneur	17	11.97%
Usage Frequency/Month	Civil Servant (PNS)	6	4.23%
	1-10 times	80	56.34%
	11-20 times	25	17.61%
	21-30 times	14	9.86%
	> 30 times	23	16.20%
Income	< Rp 1,000,000	36	25.35%
	Rp 1,000,000 - Rp 2,000,000	45	31.69%
	Rp 2,000,000 - Rp 3,000,000	36	25.35%
	Rp 3,000,000 - Rp 4,000,000	10	7.04%
	> Rp 4,000,000	15	10.56%

Source: Author's processed data (2026)

Outer Model Evaluation

The outer model was evaluated for construct validity and reliability through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability testing. Convergent validity is determined by outer loading values of 0.70 or above; however, in explanatory research, values between 0.60 and 0.70 remain acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). The results are presented in Table 4.

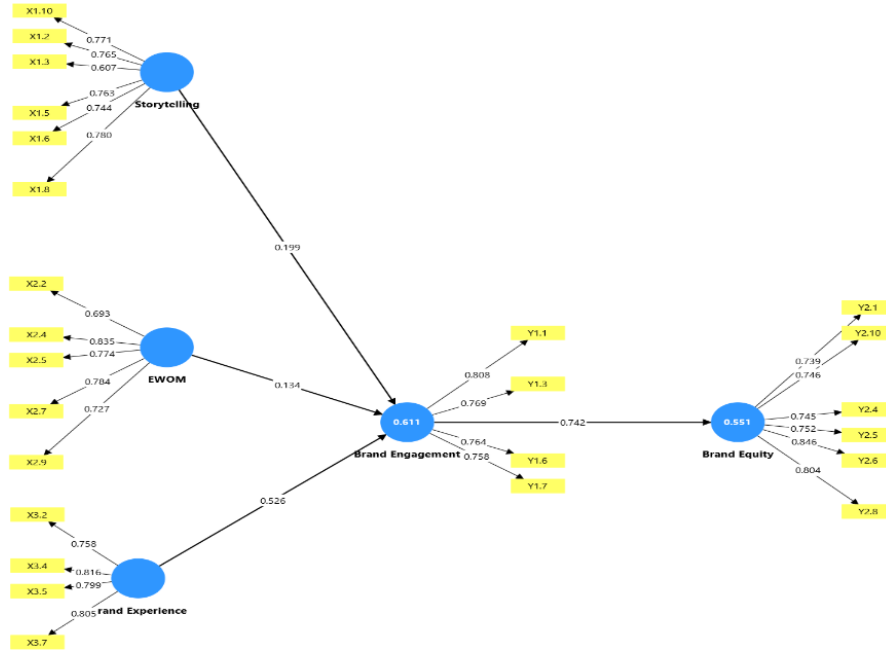


Figure 1 Structural Model.

Table 4. Convergent Validity Test Results (Outer Loading)

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading
Storytelling (X1)	X1.2	0.765
	X1.3	0.607
	X1.5	0.763
	X1.6	0.744
	X1.8	0.780
	X1.10	0.771
E-WOM (X2)	X2.2	0.693
	X2.4	0.835
	X2.5	0.774
	X2.7	0.784
	X2.9	0.727
Brand Experience (X3)	X3.2	0.758
	X3.4	0.816
	X3.5	0.799
	X3.7	0.805
Brand Engagement (Y1)	Y1.1	0.808
	Y1.3	0.769
	Y1.6	0.764

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading
Brand Equity (Y2)	Y1.6	0.764
	Y1.7	0.758
	Y2.1	0.739
	Y2.4	0.745
	Y2.5	0.752
	Y2.6	0.846
	Y2.8	0.804
	Y2.10	0.746

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

As shown in Table 4, the majority of indicators achieved outer loading values above 0.70, satisfying the convergent validity threshold. A small number of indicators- specifically X1.3 (0.607) and X2.2 (0.693)-registered values in the 0.60–0.70 range, which remain within the acceptable tolerance for explanatory studies (Hair et al., 2019). Indicators falling below the 0.60 threshold were eliminated from the model. After these eliminations, the measurement model satisfactorily met the convergent validity criteria.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, comparing the square root of AVE for each construct against inter-construct correlations. Results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity Test Results (Fornell-Larcker)

Variable	BE (Y1)	BEQ (Y2)	BX (X3)	EWOM (X2)	ST (X1)
Brand Engagement	0.775				
Brand Equity	0.742	0.773			
Brand Experience	0.753	0.694	0.795		
E-WOM	0.650	0.683	0.710	0.764	
Storytelling	0.643	0.711	0.662	0.718	0.741

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

The Fornell-Larcker results confirm that the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with all other constructs, indicating that each variable possesses adequate discriminant validity.

Construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, composite reliability, and AVE, as presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Engagement	0.779	0.857	0.601
Brand Equity	0.865	0.899	0.598
Brand Experience	0.806	0.873	0.632
E-WOM	0.820	0.875	0.584
Storytelling	0.834	0.879	0.549

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

All constructs returned Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability values above 0.70, and AVE values above 0.50, confirming that all constructs satisfy the requisite reliability and validity standards and are fit for further analysis.

Inner Model Evaluation

The inner model was evaluated to gauge the model's explanatory capacity through the R-square (R^2) coefficient, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. R-Square Test Results

Variable	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square
Brand Engagement (Y1)	0.611	0.603
Brand Equity (Y2)	0.551	0.548

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

The R^2 value for brand engagement (0.611) indicates that 61.1% of the variance in brand engagement is jointly explained by storytelling, e-WOM, and brand experience, while the remaining 38.9% is attributable to factors outside the model a result classified as moderate to strong. The R^2 value for brand equity (0.551) shows that 55.1% of the variance in brand equity is accounted for by brand engagement.

To ensure the robustness of the model, a full collinearity test was conducted using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Following Kock (2015), VIF values below 3.3 indicate that common method bias is unlikely to affect the results.

Table 8. VIF Results

Relationship	VIF
Storytelling (X1) → Brand Engagement (Y1)	2.118
E-WOM (X2) → Brand Engagement (Y1)	1.945
Brand Experience (X3) → Brand Engagement (Y1)	2.487
Brand Engagement (Y1) → Brand Equity (Y2)	1.876

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

The results confirm that all VIF values are below the threshold of 3.3, indicating that common method bias is not a concern in this study and that the structural model is statistically robust. Furthermore, the effect size (f^2) analysis shows varying levels of influence among the constructs.

Table 9. Effect Size (f^2) Results

Relationship	F-Square	Effect Size
Storytelling → Brand Engagement	0.045	Small
E-WOM → Brand Engagement	0.018	Very Small
Brand Experience → Brand Engagement	0.319	Medium
Brand Engagement → Brand Equity	1.228	Large

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

The results indicate that brand experience has a medium effect on brand engagement, while storytelling has a small effect and e-WOM has a very small effect. In contrast, brand engagement has a large effect on brand equity, indicating its dominant role in the structural model.

Table 10. Predictive Relevance (Q-Square)

Variable	Q ²	Predictive Power
Brand Engagement (Y1)	0.587	Strong
Brand Equity (Y2)	0.537	Strong

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

The Q² values for both endogenous variables are above zero and exceed the 0.35 threshold, indicating strong predictive relevance. This confirms that the structural model has high predictive accuracy in explaining both brand engagement and brand equity.

Hypothesis testing results from the bootstrapping procedure are reported in Table 11.

Table 11. Hypothesis Test Results

Variable Relationship	Original Sample (O)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Result
Storytelling → Brand Engagement	0.199	2.434	0.015	Significant
E-WOM → Brand Engagement	0.134	1.456	0.145	Not Significant
Brand Experience → Brand Engagement	0.526	5.948	0.000	Significant
Brand Engagement → Brand Equity	0.742	15.339	0.000	Significant

Source: SmartPLS Processed Data (2026)

The hypothesis testing results indicate that storytelling has a positive and significant effect on brand engagement ($\beta = 0.199$; $t = 2.434$; $p = 0.015$), suggesting that effective narrative-based content contributes to strengthening consumer engagement with the brand. E-WOM, however, shows a positive but non-significant effect on brand engagement ($\beta = 0.134$; $t = 1.456$; $p = 0.145$), indicating that online reviews and recommendations do not play a substantial role in shaping engagement in this context. In contrast, brand experience demonstrates a strong and significant influence on brand engagement ($\beta = 0.526$; $t = 5.948$; $p < 0.001$), highlighting its dominant role in driving consumer involvement. Furthermore, brand engagement exhibits a strong and highly significant effect on brand equity ($\beta = 0.742$; $t = 15.339$; $p < 0.001$), confirming its critical role in enhancing brand value perception. Overall, the findings suggest that experiential and narrative-based factors are more influential in driving engagement compared to electronic word of mouth in the Skintific context.

DISCUSSION

Storytelling and Brand Engagement

Storytelling was found to exert a positive and significant influence on brand engagement (t -statistic = 2.434; $p = 0.015$), confirming H1. This finding indicates that Skintific's ability to deliver authentic, attractive, and relevant narratives effectively increases consumer involvement with the brand. Generation Z consumers tend to respond more positively to emotional and narrative-based content than to purely product-focused promotions. Through storytelling, consumers can connect with the values, experiences, and meanings embedded in brand messages, leading to greater attention, enthusiasm, and interaction with the brand.

This result is consistent with Nakhil (2019), who found that storytelling strengthens consumer engagement by fostering emotional connections between consumers and brands. Similar findings

were reported by Sari & Praswati (2024) and Nguyen et al. (2025), who demonstrated that brand storytelling enhances consumer participation and brand interaction. Furthermore, Lundqvist et al. (2013) argued that storytelling creates more personal relationships between consumers and brands by transforming information into meaningful experiences. Nevertheless, the effect of storytelling was lower than that of brand experience, suggesting that although narratives can attract consumers' attention, direct experiences with the brand remain more influential in shaping engagement among Generation Z consumers.

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Brand Engagement

E-WOM was found not to have a significant effect on brand engagement (t-statistic = 1.456; $p = 0.145$), leading to the rejection of H2. This finding suggests that online reviews, comments, and recommendations regarding Skintific do not necessarily translate into stronger consumer engagement. In the skincare industry, consumers often use online reviews primarily as a source of information for evaluating product quality and suitability rather than as a basis for building emotional attachment to a brand. Consequently, consumers may benefit from e-WOM when making purchase decisions without becoming actively involved in brand-related activities.

A possible explanation is that Generation Z consumers are constantly exposed to large amounts of user-generated content across social media and e-commerce platforms. This condition may reduce the uniqueness and persuasive power of online reviews, causing consumers to perceive them as routine information rather than engagement triggers. This interpretation supports Ismagilova et al. (2020), who suggested that information overload can weaken the effectiveness of e-WOM, and Jalilvand & Samiei (2012), who emphasized the importance of review credibility in shaping consumer responses. Similarly, Desynta et al. (2026) demonstrated that consumers do not always respond to marketing-related stimuli in the expected manner, as pre-existing perceptions and brand familiarity may reduce the influence of certain factors on subsequent consumer responses. However, this result differs from Cheung et al. (2020), Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan (2021), Tuzzahra & Rose Rahmidani (2026), and Nguyen et al. (2025), who reported a significant positive relationship between e-WOM and consumer engagement. These differences may be attributed to variations in consumer characteristics, product categories, and digital media usage patterns across studies.

Brand Experience and Brand Engagement

Brand experience demonstrated a positive and significant effect on brand engagement (t-statistic = 5.948; $p = 0.000$), confirming H3 and representing the strongest predictor in the model. This finding indicates that consumers who have positive experiences with Skintific are more likely to pay attention to the brand, participate in brand-related activities, and maintain ongoing interactions with the brand. Positive experiences may emerge through sensory impressions, emotional responses, product performance, and consumers' intellectual engagement with the brand.

The strong effect of brand experience may be explained by the experiential nature of skincare products. Unlike marketing communications that rely on information or persuasion, brand experience is based on direct interaction with the product and therefore provides stronger evidence of product value. When consumers experience satisfactory product performance, they are more likely to develop trust, positive emotions, and long-term interest in the brand. This finding supports Brakus et al. (2009), who identified brand experience as a key determinant of consumer-brand relationships. Similar results were reported by Fikri et al. (2020) dan Syamsuddin & Fadhillah (2024), who found that memorable brand experiences encourage stronger consumer attachment and active participation in brand activities. The dominance of brand experience in this study further suggests that engagement among Generation Z consumers is

driven more strongly by actual consumption experiences than by marketing communications alone.

Brand Engagement and Brand Equity

Brand engagement was found to have a positive and significant effect on brand equity (t-statistic = 15.339; $p = 0.000$), confirming H4. This finding indicates that consumers who actively engage with Skintific tend to develop stronger brand awareness, more favorable brand associations, and greater loyalty toward the brand. Through continuous interaction and emotional involvement, consumers build deeper relationships with the brand, which ultimately strengthens its value in their minds.

This result is consistent with O'Brien Cáceres & Arana Barbier (2025), who found that consumer engagement contributes significantly to brand equity through enhanced loyalty and emotional attachment. Similar findings were reported by Tanamal et al. (2022), who highlighted the role of engagement in strengthening brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality. Syamsuddin & Fadhilla (2024) also found that consumers who actively interact with brands tend to hold more positive perceptions of them, while Hollebeek et al. (2014) emphasized that engagement facilitates long-term relationships that reinforce brand strength. From a theoretical perspective, these findings suggest that brand engagement functions as an important mechanism through which consumer experiences and marketing activities are transformed into brand equity. In this regard, engagement serves as a bridge linking consumers' interactions with the brand to the creation of long-term brand value.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that storytelling and brand experience positively and significantly influence brand engagement among Generation Z consumers of Skintific in Malang City, whereas e-WOM does not significantly affect brand engagement. In addition, brand engagement was found to positively influence brand equity, with brand experience emerging as the strongest predictor of brand engagement. These findings suggest that engagement is more effectively developed through consumers' direct experiences with a brand than through exposure to online reviews alone. The insignificant effect of e-WOM indicates that digital information may primarily function as a source of product evaluation rather than as a driver of emotional attachment and active consumer involvement. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Theory by demonstrating that brand engagement serves as an important mechanism linking marketing activities and consumer experiences to brand equity creation. The findings further highlight that experiential factors play a more prominent role than informational factors in strengthening consumer engagement among Generation Z consumers.

From a managerial perspective, skincare brands should prioritize the creation of positive and memorable brand experiences through superior product performance, emotional connection, and meaningful consumer interactions, while simultaneously leveraging storytelling to strengthen consumer-brand relationships. The findings imply that relying solely on e-WOM may be insufficient to enhance engagement, particularly among consumers who are highly exposed to digital content. This study is limited to Generation Z consumers of Skintific in Malang City, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings across different consumer segments and market contexts. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to examine additional variables such as brand trust, brand love, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention, as well as to investigate different product categories, generations, and geographical settings to further validate and extend the applicability of the proposed model.

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