

Brand Engagement as A Key Factor in the Success of Meme Marketing in Generation Z

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Abstract: The development of digital technology and social media has driven significant changes in marketing strategies, especially in reaching Generation Z who have unique characteristics in consuming content. One of the fastest-growing strategies is meme marketing, which relies on humor, creativity, and cultural relevance. This study aims to analyze the role of brand involvement as a key factor in meme marketing success, as well as test the influence of customer attitudes and media distribution as supporting variables. The study used a quantitative approach with a survey method of 100 Generation Z respondents in Jakarta. The sampling technique used purposive sampling, with the criteria of active respondents using social media. Data were collected through a Likert scale-based questionnaire and analyzed using a multivariate statistical approach. The results showed that brand engagement had a positive and significant effect on the effectiveness of meme marketing, while customer attitudes and media distribution had no significant effect. These findings confirm that the success of meme marketing is determined more by emotional interaction and active consumer involvement than rational factors or distribution channels. This research contributes to the

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development of digital marketing literature as well as practical implications for companies in designing communication strategies that are more relevant to Generation Z.

Keywords: brand engagement, meme marketing, generation Z, digital marketing, social media.

Introduction

The development of digital technology and social media has fundamentally changed the way companies interact with consumers. Social media not only serves as a communication channel, but also as an interaction space that allows for the active involvement of consumers in the marketing process. In this context, digital marketing has evolved from a one-way approach to two-way communication that is participatory and interactive. Recent research shows that social media plays an important role in building relationships between brands and consumers through sustainable, experience-based interactions ([Peters et al., 2013](#); [Vieira et al., 2023](#)).

Generation Z as a digital native has unique characteristics in consuming content. They prefer content that is visual, concise, interactive, and entertaining compared to traditional marketing content. This trend encourages companies to adopt more creative and entertainment-based marketing strategies. Recent studies show that Generation Z's engagement with digital content is strongly influenced by the emotional and experiential aspects resulting from interaction with that content ([Kaur et al., 2020](#); [Razzaq et al., 2024](#)). One of the fastest-growing digital marketing strategies is meme marketing. Memes are a form of digital content that combines visual and textual elements with the aim of conveying a message in a humorous and easy-to-understand way. In the context of marketing, memes have the ability to increase the appeal of content as well as encourage the viral dissemination of information. Recent research shows that meme marketing is able to create a more immersive consumer experience through narrative transportation mechanisms, which ultimately improves attitudes towards advertising and consumer engagement ([Razzaq et al., 2024](#)).

In addition, recent literature studies also confirm that meme marketing does not only function as entertainment but has evolved into a marketing strategy based on communication theories and consumer behavior, such as Uses and Gratifications Theory and Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R). Memes are able to influence consumer perception, build brand identity, and increase engagement through cultural appropriateness and social relevance. In fact, research shows that meme content can generate a much higher level of interaction compared to conventional marketing content, due to its relatable and easy-to-share nature ([Agrawal, 2024](#)). However, the success of meme marketing does not only depend on the creativity of the content. One of the main factors that determine its effectiveness is brand engagement. Brand engagement reflects the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connections between consumers

and brands formed through digital interactions. Recent research shows that meme-based marketing strategies can significantly increase brand engagement, ultimately impacting consumer loyalty and behavior.

On the other hand, the factors of customer attitude and media distribution still showed mixed results in previous studies. Some studies show that customer attitudes are not always the main determinant in the context of entertainment-based marketing, as consumers prioritize emotional experiences over rational evaluations. In addition, the wide distribution of media does not guarantee success if it is not supported by relevant and trend-appropriate content quality. Although research on meme marketing continues to develop, there are still limitations in understanding the main factors that determine its success, especially in Generation Z. Therefore, this study is important to empirically examine the role of brand engagement as a key factor in the success of meme marketing, as well as examine the influence of other supporting variables in the context of modern digital marketing. Research on meme marketing has grown rapidly in recent years, especially in the context of digital marketing and social media. Previous studies have highlighted the role of memes in increasing brand awareness, engagement, and purchase intent ([Malodia et al., 2022](#); [Teng & Lee, 2022](#)). In addition, recent research has also begun to integrate consumer psychology concepts such as emotional engagement and narrative transportation in explaining the effectiveness of meme marketing ([Razzaq et al., 2024](#)).

However, most of the research still focuses on the general impact of meme marketing without in-depth examining the specific factors that determine its success, especially in the context of Generation Z. In addition, there are inconsistencies in the research results related to the role of customer attitudes and media distribution in digital marketing. Based on this gap, this research contributes novelty as follows. First, this study places brand engagement as the main variable that explains the success of meme marketing, not just as a mediating or additional variable. Second, the study shows that customer attitudes and media distribution are not always significant factors, which differs from assumptions in traditional marketing theory. Third, this study specifically examines Generation Z as a research subject, who has unique characteristics in responding to digital content. Thus, this study not only strengthens the literature on meme marketing but also provides a new perspective on the importance of brand engagement as a key factor in modern digital marketing strategies.

Literature Review

Brand engagement is an important concept in digital marketing that reflects the level of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral interaction between consumers and brands. According to Hollebeek (2011), brand engagement shows the extent to which consumers are actively

engaged in interacting with brands through various digital activities. In the latest context, brand engagement is not only understood as a passive response, but also as a form of active consumer participation in creating value co-creation through social media ([Hollebeek et al., 2019](#)). Recent research shows that high engagement can increase consumer loyalty and strengthen long-term relationships between consumers and brands ([Rabbanee et al., 2020](#)). In the context of meme marketing, brand engagement has become increasingly relevant due to the characteristics of memes that are interactive and easy to share. Memes allow consumers to not only be recipients of messages, but also as spreaders and even content creators. Recent studies show that meme-based content is able to significantly increase engagement because it contains elements of humor, cultural relevance, and emotional closeness to the audience ([Malodia et al., 2022](#); [Razzaq et al., 2024](#)). Customer attitude is a comprehensive evaluation that consumers have of a brand, which includes cognitive, affective, and conative aspects. Customer attitudes have traditionally been considered to be the primary predictors in determining consumer behavior, including purchase intent and loyalty ([Alba & Williams, 2013](#)). However, in the digital era dominated by entertainment content, the role of customer attitudes is starting to shift. Recent research shows that in the context of digital content such as memes, consumer responses are influenced more by emotional and experiential factors than rational evaluations ([Kaur et al., 2020](#); [Agrawal, 2024](#)). Media distribution refers to the strategy of disseminating content through various digital platforms. Social media provides a great opportunity for companies to reach a wide audience as well as build more personalized communication with consumers ([Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017](#)). However, the effectiveness of media distribution is not only determined by the platform used, but also by the quality and relevance of the content delivered. Recent studies show that content distribution without the right creative strategy will not result in optimal engagement ([Vieira et al., 2023](#)). Meme marketing as a digital marketing strategy is getting more attention in the academic literature. Memes have the ability to create high virality due to their easy-to-understand and shareable nature. Shifman (2013) explained that memes are a form of digital communication that is able to spread quickly through the process of imitation and modification. Recent research shows that meme marketing can increase brand awareness, engagement, and even purchase intent through narrative transportation and emotional engagement mechanisms ([Razzaq et al., 2024](#); [Teng & Lee, 2022](#)). This study aims to analyze the influence of brand engagement, customer attitudes, and media distribution on meme marketing in Generation Z. As the basis for the research, a framework of thought was prepared that describes the relationship between variables in this study as follows. To provide a clearer understanding of the relationships among the variables examined in this study, a research model was developed based on the proposed hypotheses and supporting theories. The research framework used in this study is presented in Figure 1 below.

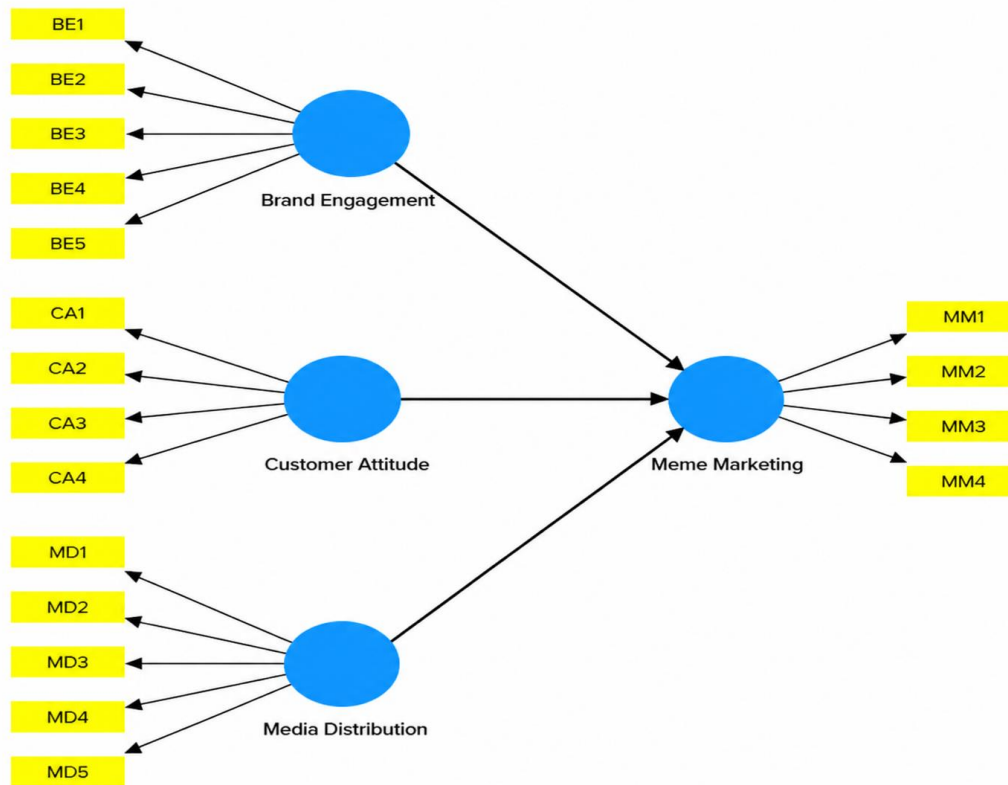


Figure 1 Proposed Research Model

Based on the research framework presented in Figure 1, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Brand Engagement has a positive effect on Meme Marketing.

H2: Customer Attitude has a positive effect on Meme Marketing.

H3: Media Distribution has a positive effect on Meme Marketing

Furthermore, the proposed hypotheses were tested using the PLS-SEM method to understand the significance of the relationships between Brand Engagement, Customer Attitude, Media Distribution, and Meme Marketing. The results of the hypothesis testing are reported in the next section.

Research Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. The research population is Generation Z in Jakarta, with a sample of 100 respondents selected using purposive sampling techniques. The respondent criteria are individuals who actively use social media and are familiar with meme content. Data was collected through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The data analysis in this study was carried out using the Structural Equation Modeling approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) with the help of SmartPLS

software. The PLS-SEM method was chosen because it is able to analyze the relationship between latent variables simultaneously and is suitable for use in studies with relatively small sample sizes and data distribution that does not have to be normal ([Hair et al., 2014](#)). The analysis was carried out through two main stages, namely the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and the evaluation of the structural model (inner model).

At the evaluation stage of the measurement model, the validity and reliability of the construct are tested. Convergent validity was measured through the outer loading value and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with the criteria of outer loading value ≥ 0.70 and AVE ≥ 0.50 ([Henseler et al., 2015](#)). Furthermore, discriminant validity is tested using the Fornell-Larcker criteria and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to ensure that each construct has a clear distinction from each other. The reliability of the construct is tested using the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values. A construct is declared reliable if it has a Composite Reliability value of ≥ 0.70 and Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.60 ([Hair et al., 2014](#)).

At the evaluation stage of the structural model, the determination coefficient (R^2) test was carried out to measure the ability of independent variables to explain dependent variables. In addition, an effect size (f^2) test was carried out to determine the magnitude of the influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Hypothesis testing was carried out using the bootstrapping technique by looking at t-statistics and p-values. The hypothesis is stated to be accepted when the t-values > 1.96 and the p-values < 0.05 ([Hair et al., 2014](#)). In addition, a predictive relevance (Q^2) test was carried out to assess the predictive ability of the model, as well as Goodness of Fit (GoF) to evaluate the overall suitability of the model.

Result

Evaluation of Measurement Models (Outer Model)

External model testing showed that all indicators had a loading factor value above 0.70 so that they met the convergent validity criteria ([Hair et al., 2021](#)). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for each construct is above 0.50, which means that the construct can explain more than 50% of the variance of its indicator. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables were above 0.70, so it can be concluded that the research instrument has good reliability.

Discriminant validity testing through the Fornell-Larcker criterion showed that the square root of AVE in each construct was greater than the correlation between other constructs. In addition, the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) value is also below the limit of 0.90, which indicates that each construct has adequate discrimination.

Evaluation of Structural Models (Inner Model)

The results of the internal model evaluation showed that the value of the determination coefficient (R-Square) in the meme marketing variable was 0.610. This shows that all exogenous variables have a moderate influence, which is 61.0% on Meme Marketing. Meanwhile, the remaining 39.0% was influenced by other variables outside the model.

Hypothesis Test Results

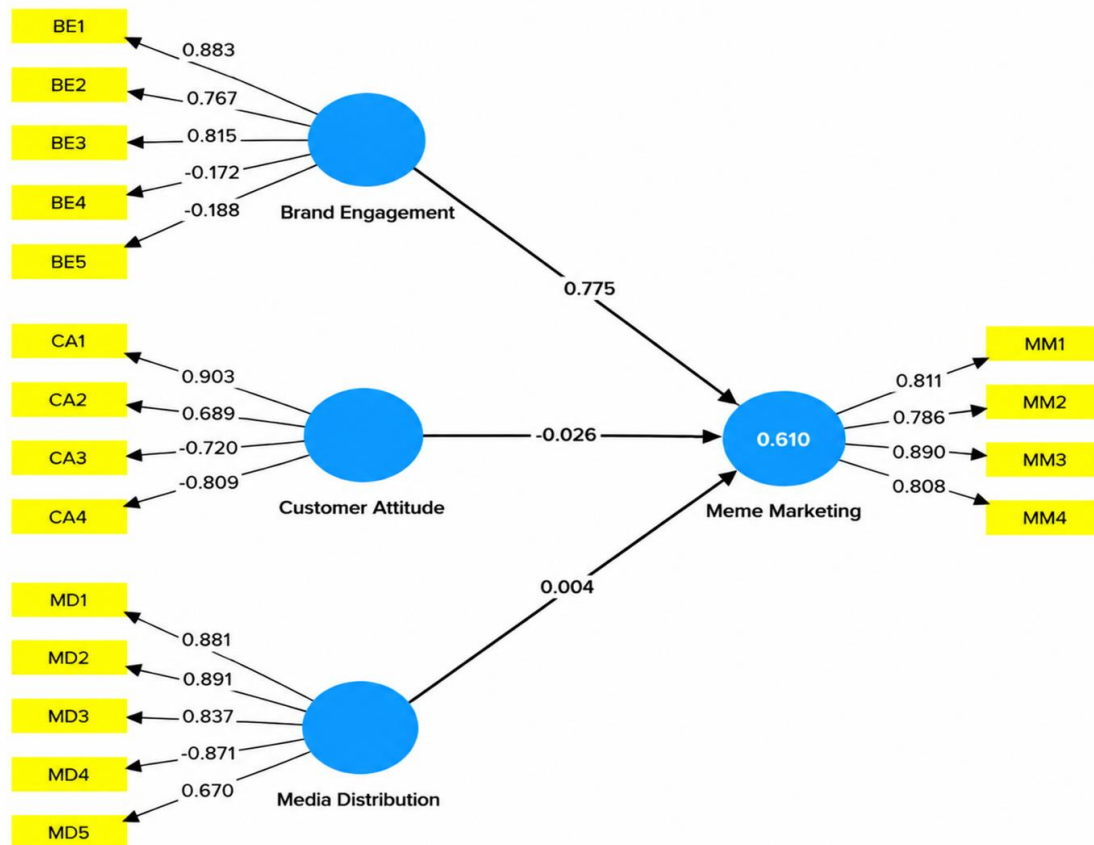


Figure 2 Structural Model and Bootstrapping Results

The structural model and bootstrapping results of the proposed hypotheses in this study are presented in Figure 2. The figure represents the relationships between Brand Engagement, Customer Attitude, Media Distribution and Meme Marketing using the PLS-SEM approach. The path coefficient values indicate that the strongest positive impact on Meme Marketing is from Brand Engagement, while the effects of Customer Attitude and Media Distribution are relatively weak. The bootstrapping analysis was conducted to find out the significance of the relationships between the independent variables and Meme Marketing. The evaluation was based on the path coefficients, T-statistics and p-value to accept or reject the proposed hypotheses. The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Hypothesis Testing Results Using Bootstrapping

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values	Result
Brand Engagement → Meme Marketing	0.775	0.767	0.073	10.614	0.000	Significant
Customer Attitude → Meme Marketing	-0.026	-0.046	0.090	0.283	0.777	Not Significant
Media Distribution → Meme Marketing	0.004	0.004	0.095	0.042	0.966	Not Significant

Table 1 shows that Meme Marketing has significant effect on Brand Engagement. The results show that the path coefficient is 0.775, T-statistic is 10.614 and the p-value is 0.000. The T-statistic is more than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05, so the hypothesis is accepted. This implies that the success of meme marketing among Generation Z can be enhanced by stronger interaction and connection between brands and audiences. Meme content that is engaging, relatable, and entertaining captures more attention and boosts the audience's interest in the brand. On the other side, Customer Attitude and Media Distribution has no significant effect towards Meme Marketing. Customer Attitude coefficient value is -0.026 with p-value of 0.777 and coefficient value of Media Distribution is 0.004 with p-value of 0.966. Both variables have T-statistics below 1.96 which means hypotheses are rejected. The results indicate that the effectiveness of meme marketing is less about customer attitudes or media distribution and more about the way brands generate engagement with their audience.

Discussion

The results of the study show that brand engagement has a positive and significant influence on the effectiveness of meme marketing in Generation Z. These findings confirm that consumer engagement is a key factor in the success of digital marketing strategies. In the context of social media, brand engagement is reflected through active consumer interactions such as liking, commenting, and sharing content. This activity not only increases the visibility of the content but also expands the reach of marketing organically. These findings are in line with the research of Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek et al. (2019) which stated that consumer engagement is an important element in creating long-term relationships between brands and consumers.

In the context of meme marketing, brand engagement is becoming increasingly important because of the meme's interactive and easy-to-spread characteristics. Memes that are relevant to culture and everyday experiences are able to create an emotional closeness to the audience.

This is supported by research by Malodia et al. (2022) who stated that meme-based content can increase engagement through humor and cultural relevance. In addition, Razzaq et al. (2024) show that meme marketing is able to increase engagement through the mechanism of narrative transportation, where consumers feel emotionally involved in the message conveyed.

On the contrary, the results of the study show that customer attitudes have no significant effect on meme marketing. These findings indicate that in the context of Generation Z, the decision to interact with content is not entirely based on a rational evaluation of the brand. Generation Z tends to be more responsive to entertaining and relatable content compared to content that is informative in nature. This is in line with the research of Kaur et al. (2020) who stated that engagement in social media is more influenced by emotional experiences than cognitive attitudes. Thus, even if consumers have a positive attitude towards brands, it does not directly guarantee the success of meme marketing.

Media distribution also did not show a significant influence on the effectiveness of meme marketing. This shows that the choice of distribution platform alone is not enough to guarantee the success of the marketing strategy. The success of meme marketing is more determined by the quality of the content delivered, such as creativity, relevance, and suitability with emerging trends. These findings support the concept of content is king in digital marketing, where engaging content has a greater role than the medium used to disseminate it (Vieira et al., 2023). Overall, the results of this study show that in the context of modern digital marketing, especially meme marketing, brand engagement is the main factor that determines the success of marketing strategies. This indicates that companies need to focus more on creating content that is able to actively encourage consumer interaction and engagement

Research Implications

Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to the development of digital marketing literature by emphasizing that brand engagement is a key variable in explaining the effectiveness of meme marketing. These findings reinforce the theory of engagement that states that active consumer interaction plays an important role in building relationships between brands and consumers. In addition, this study also shows that in the digital context, especially in Generation Z, emotional factors are more dominant than rational factors in influencing consumer responses to marketing content. This research also contributes by showing that customer attitudes and media distribution are not always significant factors in entertainment content-based marketing. This provides a new perspective in the marketing literature that has so far emphasized the role of customer attitudes as the main determinant of consumer behavior.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, this research provides important implications for companies in designing digital marketing strategies. Companies are advised to focus more on increasing consumer engagement through content that is creative, humorous, and relevant to emerging trends. The memes created must be able to create an emotional connection with the audience in order to increase engagement to the maximum. Additionally, companies need to avoid overly formal or hard-selling marketing approaches in meme marketing. Content that is too sales-oriented tends to be less appealing to Generation Z. Instead, a more relaxed, authentic, and relatable approach will be more effective in attracting attention and increasing interaction. Companies also need to understand that the choice of distribution platform is not a major factor in marketing success. Therefore, the main focus should be on the quality of the content produced. However, there are several limitations to this study. This research is limited only to 100 Generation Z respondents in Jakarta and only examines Brand Engagement, Customer Attitude and Media Distribution as the factors that influence Meme Marketing. Therefore, future research will likely include larger and more varied samples as well as more variables such as emotional appeal, creativity, humor, and content quality to provide a broader understanding of the effectiveness of meme marketing.

Conclusions

This study aims to analyze the role of brand involvement as a key factor in the success of meme marketing in Generation Z, as well as test the influence of customer attitudes and media distribution as supporting variables. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that brand engagement has a positive and significant influence on the effectiveness of meme marketing. This shows that the higher the level of consumer interaction with brands, the greater the success of marketing strategies carried out through memes. In contrast, customer attitudes and media distribution have no significant influence on meme marketing. These findings suggest that in the context of Generation Z, marketing success is more influenced by emotional and experiential factors than by rational evaluations or distribution channels used. Thus, this study confirms that brand engagement is a key factor in the success of meme marketing, and companies need to develop marketing strategies that focus on increasing consumer engagement through creative and relevant content. This study highlights the importance of Brand Engagement in the success of Meme Marketing for Generation Z. Therefore, businesses are encouraged to develop innovative, engaging and relatable content to increase consumer engagement and improve the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in the age of social media.

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