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THE IMPACT OF AUTHENTICITY, INFLUENCER MARKETING, PERCEIVED QUALITY, AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES ON BRAND EQUITY

(Study on iPhone Consumers in Kudus)

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ABSTRACT

Technological advances have increased business competition, so strengthening brand equity is crucial. This research aims to determine the influence of authenticity, influencer marketing, perceived quality, and social media marketing activities on brand equity for iPhone products in Kudus. This research used quantitative methods with non-probability sampling on 150 respondents; data analysis was carried out with SEM-PLS using Smart PLS. The research results show that authenticity, perceived quality, and social media marketing activities positively and significantly affect brand equity, while influencer marketing has no effect. The limitation of this research is that it focuses on iPhone consumers in Kudus, so the results may not be generalizable. Future research is recommended to expand the sample and context to test the consistency of the results and explore additional factors that influence brand equity.

Keywords: authenticity, brand equity, influencer, perceived quality, social media

ABSTRAK

Kemajuan teknologi telah meningkatkan persaingan bisnis, sehingga penguatan ekuitas merek menjadi sangat penting. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh authenticity, influencer marketing, perceived quality, dan aktivitas pemasaran media sosial terhadap ekuitas merek untuk produk iPhone di Kudus. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif dengan non-probability sampling pada 150 responden, analisis data dilakukan dengan SEM-PLS menggunakan Smart PLS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa authenticity, perceived quality, dan aktivitas pemasaran media sosial berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap ekuitas merek, sedangkan influencer marketing tidak berpengaruh. Keterbatasan penelitian ini adalah berfokus pada konsumen iPhone di Kudus, sehingga hasilnya mungkin tidak dapat digeneralisasi. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk memperluas sampel dan konteks untuk menguji konsistensi hasil dan mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor tambahan yang memengaruhi ekuitas merek.

Kata Kunci: authenticity, brand equity, influencer, perceived quality, social media

1. INTRODUCTION

In this millennial era, rapid progress in technology and competition in the business world is getting fiercer. Companies are required to produce products that are not only superior in terms of quality but also have an element of innovation. In the face of intense competition, companies must strive to strengthen the brand of their products. Brand



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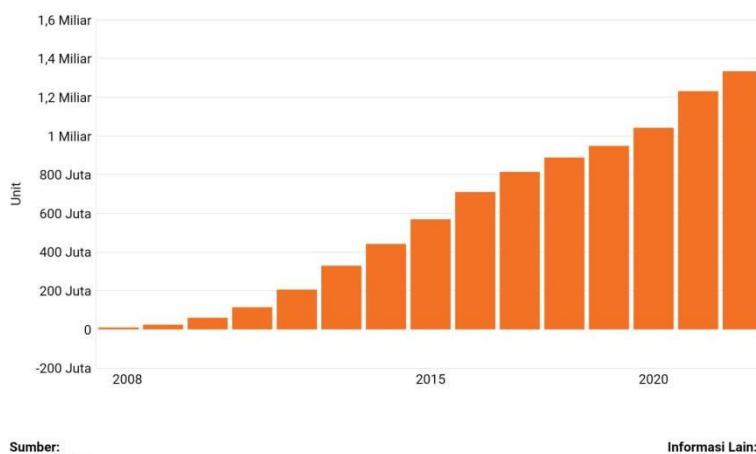
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strengthening is one of the strategies companies use to attract consumer interest in the products they offer. One of the important factors in this process is Brand Equity. Brand equity includes values associated with authenticity and perception of quality, and it is strengthened by marketing by influencers and social media. By having strong brand equity, the company can maintain its position in the market and maintain the attractiveness of its products in the eyes of consumers (Pandiangan et al., 2021).

One of the initiators of technological developments in the field of communication, whose quality is trusted by the whole world, is Apple Inc., with its product, the iPhone. The object of this research is focused on consumers of iPhone products in Kudus. The research will examine how authenticity, influencer marketing, quality perception, and social media marketing affect the brand equity of iPhone products in the city of Kudus. iPhone consumers in Kudus are the object of this research because they are part of an important market in the technology industry, where consumer loyalty and perception of brands greatly affect the company's market position.

Technological advances owned by Apple Inc. have proven to be able to influence consumer buying interest (Putri & Taufiqurahman, 2023). Based on data from Katadata.co.id, the iPhone is one of the most popular smartphone brands in the world today. Its sales have contributed significantly to Apple Inc.'s revenue, making it the largest market capitalization in the world.



Sumber:
Business of Apps

Informasi Lain:

Figure 1. Number of Active iPhones Worldwide (2012-2022)

Source: Katadata.co.id (2023)

Based on data from the Business of Apps in Katadata.co.id, the number of active iPhones worldwide reached 1.33 billion units in 2022. This figure increased 8.13% from the previous year, reaching 1.23 billion units. Over the past decade, the number of active iPhones globally has grown yearly. The number of active iPhones worldwide in 2022 is the highest since 2008. Previously, Apple Inc. reported a 1.4% year-on-year decline in revenue to US\$81.79 billion in the third quarter of 2023. This decline was due to sluggish sales of iPhones, Macs, and iPads in that period. This phenomenon shows that brand equity is the key so that products can continue to attract consumer buying interest sustainably.

Research conducted by Rodríguez-López et al. (2020) shows that Authenticity (authenticity) of the product can influence the formation of brand equity (Brand Equity). Research conducted by Ali and Alqudah (2022) shows that Influencer Marketing affects Brand Equity. Research conducted by Pandiangan et al. (2021) shows that the perception of quality significantly affects Brand Equity. Furthermore, the research conducted by



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Masa'deh et al. (2021) shows that Social Media Activities have a significant effect on Brand Equity. Some of these studies are contrary to the following studies. The research carried out by Sunariani and Ratih Ardianti (2023) shows that Influencer Marketing does not affect Brand equity. In addition, research conducted by Permatasari and Rachmawati (2021) shows that perceived quality has no significant effect on Brand Equity. Type Customer Brand Equity (CBBE), developed by Dartmouth professor Kevin Lane Keller, reveals that we must change how customers think and feel about brands to build a strong brand. Therefore, this study will prove that authenticity, influencer marketing, and perceived quality social media activities can influence brand equity in iPhone products.

This study aims to understand the influence of factors including authenticity, influencer marketing, perceived quality, and social media activities on the brand equity of iPhone products among consumers in Kudus. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding how these factors affect consumer perception of the iPhone brand, especially in the context of a local market such as Kudus. With the increasing use of iPhones and their impact on Apple Inc.'s revenue, this research makes an important contribution to companies' strategic understanding of optimizing their marketing. In addition, this study can provide consumers in Kudus with deeper insight into the main factors that influence their purchase decisions regarding iPhone products. Thus, this research is expected to provide practical benefits for companies and consumers in understanding the rapidly growing gadget market dynamics.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS

Authenticity

Authenticity is a process in which a brand can create and gain value in building consumer relationships. It is influenced by several elements, namely uniqueness, integrity, credibility, and continuity (Armeto & Surenda, 2024). Several indicators can be used to assess Authenticity: Becoming a pioneer, Maintaining the product's originality, sticking to the principles, Peculiarities, and Social connectedness (Fadli & Haque, 2023). Meanwhile, according to Rahardani (2024), Indicators of Authenticity are Continuity, Credibility, Integrity, and Symbolism. The indicators of Authenticity used in this study are Becoming a pioneer, Maintaining the product's originality, Sticking to the principles, Peculiarities, integrity, and social connections.

Influencer Marketing

According to Kotler & Keller (2016), Influencer Marketing is defined as an individual with the power of influence in purchasing decision-making. Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy that utilizes social media as a promotional platform. It involves individuals who are considered influential to their followers, such as artists, celebrities, YouTubers, and bloggers (Agustin & Amron, 2022). According to Uyuun and Dwijayanti (2022), measuring Influencer Marketing can be done with three indicators: Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness, according to v Power. Therefore, this study measures Influencer Marketing Using the indicators of Trustworthiness, Expertise, Attractiveness, Credibility, and Power.

Perceived Quality

According to Faisal and Susanti (2023), perceived quality is the view consumers hold on a product or service's overall quality or excellence that meets their expectations. Quality perception is a customer's assessment of the excellence or overall value of a product, which is based on the personal evaluation of each customer (Permatasari &



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Rachmawati, 2021). According to Setiawan et al. (2023), perceived quality has five indicators: Aesthetic, features, reliability, conformance, and durability. Meanwhile, according to Gumlilang et al. (2022), there are seven indicators of perceived quality, i.e., performance, service, durability, reliability, product characteristics, price conformity, and price. Therefore, the perception of quality in this study was measured using performance indicators, product characteristics, price conformity, reliability, durability, and conformance (conformity with specifications).

Social Media Marketing Activities

Social media marketing activities from Shankar & Yadav (2021) are the use of social media platforms and encourage users to disseminate content from social media based on its classification, namely interaction, information, word of mouth, personalization, and others. Social media marketing activities use social media as a marketing tool to build awareness, recognition, memory, and action on a brand, product, business, individual, or group, either directly or indirectly (Dahlan & Rivai, 2022). According to Masa'deh et al. (2021), indicators that can measure social media marketing consist of entertainment, customization, interactions, e-commerce, and trendiness. Meanwhile, according to Utami & Sugiat (2023), Indicators of Social Media Marketing Activities consist of interaction, Informativeness, Personalization, Trendiness, and Word of Mouth. Therefore, this study measures social media marketing activities Using the Interactions, E-WOM, Informativeness, Trendiness, Entertainment, and Interactivity indicators.

Brand Equity

Brand equity is the consumer's perception of a brand's specialties that provide strength, durability, and excellence, thus distinguishing it from other brands (Dahlan & Rivai, 2022). According to Kristin and Thyatira (2022), Brand Equity is an important aspect of branding, so almost every company focuses on building Brand Equity. Although it is essentially a relationship between Brand Equity and Brand Association, it has a limited concept because Brand Equity is a coordinated approach based on quality, brand image, and brand awareness. According to Firmansyah (2019), there are four indicators of Brand Equity: Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Associations, and Brand Loyalty. Meanwhile, according to Setiawan and Padmawidjaja (2023), there are five indicators: Performance, Social Image, Value, Trustworthiness, and Attachment. Therefore, to measure brand equity, this study will examine the performance, social image, value, trustworthiness, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

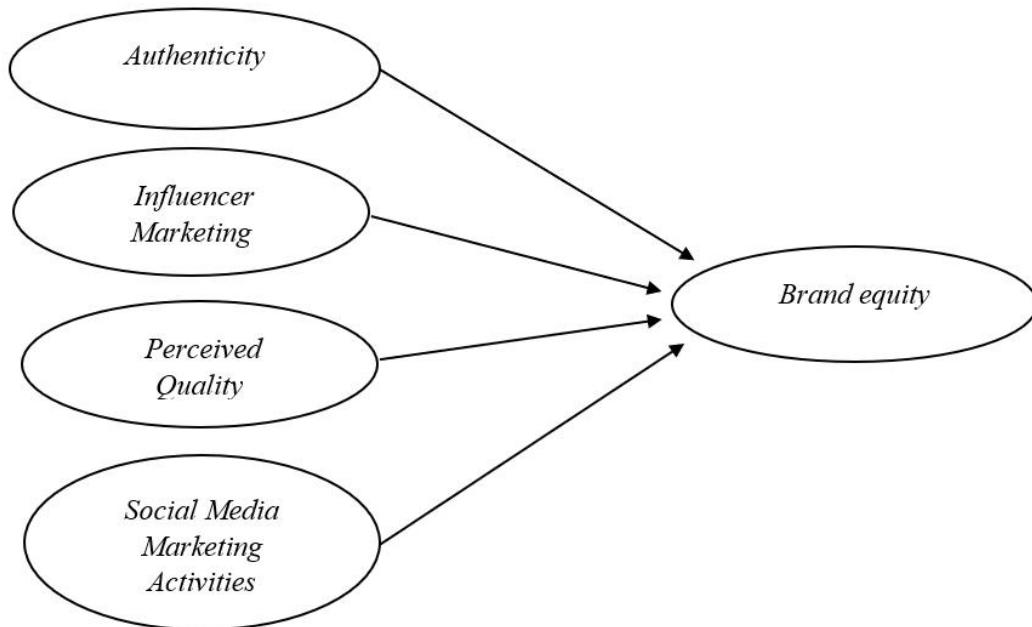


Figure 2. Theoretical Framework

Source: Previous research processed (2025)

Based on the theoretical framework of thought above, the following research hypotheses can be taken:

H₁: Authenticity has a positive and significant effect on brand equity.

H₂: Influencer marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand equity.

H₃: Perceived quality has a positive and significant effect on brand equity.

H₄: Social media marketing activities positively and significantly affect brand equity.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative research method. Quantitative research is a method based on the philosophy of positivism. This method is used to research a specific population or sample by collecting data through research instruments, analyzing data quantitatively or statistically, and testing an established hypothesis. The selection of quantitative methods in this study is because the main focus of this study is to evaluate the impact between the variables being studied. The subjects in this study are consumers of iPhone products in the Kudus area. The object of this study is the iPhone product.

This research was conducted over three months and divided into three sessions, including data collection through questionnaires by respondents, data analysis, and preparation of final research results. The research was conducted in Kudus Regency and focused on iPhone consumers. Surveys and data collection were carried out in areas of shopping malls, cafes, universities, and other public places frequented by potential consumers.

This study tests the hypothesis with the variables of *authenticity*, *influencer marketing*, *perceived quality*, *social media activities*, and *brand equity*. The object of this research is one of the districts in Central Java Province, namely Kudus Regency. Hence, the Kudus Regency is a population of people who use iPhone products as subjects. In this study, sampling was done using a *non-probability sampling method* because the number of

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populations is unknown. *Non-probability sampling* can be used when the population is unlimited or when the number of individuals is unknown. The sampling technique uses *purposive sampling* (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The sample criteria referred to in this study are:

1. Active iPhone users who have experience using the product.
2. Domiciled and/or located in the Kudus Regency.
3. Teenagers to adults.
4. Actively use social media.

The number of samples used was 150 respondents according to the determination of the number of samples according to Hair et al. (2019), which was 5-10 times the number of indicators; this study had 30 indicators (5 x 30). The data collection technique in this study uses a questionnaire by providing several written statements systematically about *authenticity, influencer marketing, perceived quality, social media marketing, and brand equity*. In filling out the questionnaire, a 5-point measurement of the Likert scale was used (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

This study uses primary data, namely data taken directly by the researcher, to answer the purpose or statement of the research. The data obtained by the researcher is processed using Microsoft Excel first so that it is more structured and can be easily observed. The data testing for this study used assistance in the form of *Software SmartPLS* with the technique of *Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)*. Primary data is processed using the Smart PLS test tool. Smart PLS test kits are chosen because of their durability, flexibility, ease of use, and effectiveness in handling complex models (Indaryani et al., 2024).

Table 1. Instrument Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	(rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Authenticity	0,770	0,786	0,851	0,589
Brand equity	0,708	0,724	0,833	0,625
Influencer marketing	0,756	0,766	0,860	0,672
Perceived Quality	0,704	0,723	0,833	0,625
Social Media Marketing	0,470	0,470	0,790	0,653

Source: processed primary data (2025)

Based on Table 1, an AVE value of > 0.05 was obtained, so it can be concluded that the indicators used in this study have good convergent validity. In addition, if the Composite Reliability value (Composite Reliability) is > 0.7, then the research data is reliable. If the loading factor is more than 0.7, then it can be said that the data in this study are valid (Table 2).

Table 2. Outer Loading Results

	Authenticity	Brand equity	Influencer Marketing	Perceived Quality	Social Media Marketing Activities
X1_1	0,752				
X1_3	0,745				
X1_5	0,771				

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	Authenticity	Brand equity	Influencer Marketing	Perceived Quality	Social Media Marketing Activities
X1_6	0,800				
X2_1			0,821		
X2_2			0,860		
X2_4			0,775		
X3_1				0,736	
X3_2				0,832	
X3_3				0,800	
X4_2					0,808
X4_4					0,809
Y_3		0,781			
Y_4		0,786			
Y_6		0,805			

Source: processed primary data (2025)

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents who were willing to fill out the questionnaire were 150. The characteristics of the research respondents can be explained based on their categories as follows. According to age and gender, respondents aged 17-24 and other types of women dominated the most. The number of respondents with jobs as students/students' percentage 91.4%, as civil servants' percentage 1.3%, as private employees with a percentage of 2%, and others with a percentage of 5.3%. So, the number of respondents who work as students/students is the most dominant, with 138 people. According to his address, the total number of respondents was divided into several areas in Kudus, namely Kaliwungu, Kudus Kota, Jati, Undaan, Dawe, Bae, Mejobo, Gebog, and Jekulo Districts, with the highest percentage being respondents with an address in Kudus City at 25.2% or 38 people. According to the duration of iPhone use, respondents with a duration of <1 year were the most dominant, with a percentage of 53.6%. Judging from the frequency of social media use, it is known that daily use is the most dominant condition of respondents, with a percentage of 97.4%.

Table 3. Results

	Original sample (O)	Sample average (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Authenticity -> Brand equity	0,171	0,169	0,075	2,286	0,022
Influencer marketing -> Brand equity	-0,017	-0,015	0,081	0,215	0,830
Perceived Quality -> Brand equity	0,531	0,534	0,072	7,372	0,000
Social Media Marketing Activities -> Brand equity	0,227	0,230	0,088	2,584	0,010

Source: processed primary data (2025)



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Based on the bootstrapping and external model testing results, the hypothesis is accepted if the statistical $t > 1.96$ or the P value < 0.05 . The effect of *Authenticity* on *Brand equity* was obtained with a p -value of $0.022 < 0.05$ and a statistical t -value (2.286) > 1.96 , so it can be concluded that *Authenticity* has a positive and significant effect on *Brand equity*, so the hypothesis is accepted. These results can be interpreted as if the authenticity of a brand (*Authenticity*) is improving, *then brand equity* is increasing. From the observations, it was found that the iPhone brand is a pioneer in introducing new technology, has unique characteristics compared to other phones, adheres to principles in every innovation, and can build good relationships with its users.

The influence of *influencer marketing* on *brand equity* was obtained with a p -value of $0.830 > 0.05$ and a statistical t -value (0.215) < 1.96 , so it can be concluded that *influencer marketing* does not affect *brand equity*, so the hypothesis is rejected. These results show that *influencer marketing* does not necessarily build *brand equity* in iPhone products. This is because recommendations from influencers do not fully make consumers confident to buy an iPhone; influencers do not fully know about the features and performance of the iPhone and do not fully provide useful, relevant, and trustworthy information.

The effect of *perceived quality* on *brand equity* was obtained with a p -value ($0.000 < 0.005$) and a statistical t -value (7.372) > 1.96 , so it can be concluded that *perceived quality* has a positive and significant effect on *brand equity*, so the hypothesis is accepted. This result means that brand equity will increase if the perception of product quality improves. The observation results showed that iPhone products can function properly and without problems and have better features than other brands. The price is comparable to the quality obtained.

The influence of *social media marketing activities* on *brand equity* was obtained with a p -value of $0.010 < 0.05$ and a statistical t -value (2.584) > 1.96 , so it can be concluded that *social media marketing activities* have a positive and significant effect on *brand equity*, so the hypothesis is accepted. These results can be interpreted as follows: if marketing activities on social media increase, brand equity will increase further. From the observations, it was found that iPhone posts on social media always follow the latest trends.

Table 4. Model Feasibility Test Results

Criterion	Saturated model	Model forecast
SRMR	0,093	0,093
d_ULS	0,905	0,905
d_G	0,349	0,349
Chi-square	294,663	294,663
NFI	0,654	0,654

Source: Primary data processed (2025)

Based on the explanation from the Smart PLS website, one of the limitations or criteria for a fit model is if the SRMR or Standardized Root Mean Square value < 0.10 . Therefore, table 4 shows that the model in this study is declared to meet the criteria. The theoretical implications of this study show that *authenticity*, *perceived quality*, and *social media marketing activities* have a significant role in building *brand equity*. In contrast,



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influencer marketing has no significant influence. This enriches the literature on the determinants of *brand equity*, especially in the context of high-tech products such as the iPhone. Companies can focus their marketing strategies by emphasizing brand authenticity, ensuring high product quality, and optimizing marketing activities on social media to strengthen *brand equity*. In addition, companies should also review the effectiveness of *influencer marketing* by ensuring that the chosen influencers understand and can provide accurate and trustworthy information about their products. This strategy is expected to increase consumer trust and loyalty, ultimately strengthening the brand's position in the market.

The interplay between authenticity, influencer marketing, perceived quality, and social media marketing activities significantly shapes brand equity in the contemporary digital landscape. Emerging studies confirm that authenticity is critical in building trust and enhancing engagement between brands and consumers. Influencers who convey genuine interaction and transparency foster perceptions of authenticity among their followers, enhancing brand equity. Consumers increasingly demand authentic connections with influencers, recognizing them as more trustworthy than traditional advertising (Bari et al., 2024; Lusianti et al., 2024; Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023). This authenticity is facilitated by various marketing strategies that convey the brand's values and ethos, thereby strengthening consumers' perceptions of brand integrity and reliability (Afef, 2024; Mardani et al., 2024).

Influencer marketing is most effective when influencers are perceived as authentic because they align the brand's perceived authenticity with consumers' attitudes. The impact of perceived authenticity on brand loyalty and purchase intentions has been well documented. Studies show that authenticity leads to increased consumer emotional engagement and commitment (Daimi & Tolunay, 2021). Influencer marketing has also been shown to leverage social media activities effectively, where brands can leverage influencers to capture the attention of target audiences (Kapitan et al., 2021; Park & Namkung, 2022). By leveraging social media platforms for influencer partnerships, brands increase their reach and improve the perceived quality of their products ((Aji et al., 2020; Lusianti et al., 2022; Vendri et al., 2023).

Social media marketing activities are crucial in building brand equity through increased interaction, engagement, and feedback mechanisms between brands and consumers. Marketing activity categories such as personalization, entertainment, and interactivity have been shown to enhance consumer-based brand equity, increasing brand awareness and fostering deeper brand relationships (Park & Namkung, 2022). Engagement generated through social media marketing is positively correlated with perceived quality, which is integral to enhancing brand equity (Bernadus et al., 2023; Koay et al., 2020). These dynamics highlight the need for brands to implement a comprehensive social media strategy that optimizes consumer engagement and interaction to enhance their brand image and equity. The combination of authenticity in influencer marketing, perceived quality, and proactive social media marketing activities collectively enhance brand equity. Brands that successfully engage in these dimensions are more likely to grow a loyal consumer base that actively contributes to brand advocacy, ultimately leading to improved market performance.

5. CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

Based on the results of the analysis that has been described, the following conclusions can be drawn: *Authenticity* has a positive and significant effect on *brand equity*. This means that the better the authenticity of a brand, the *more brand equity* will increase.



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Influencer marketing does not affect *brand equity*. This means that changes in *influencer marketing* do not affect *brand equity*. Perceived quality has a positive and significant effect on *brand equity*. This means that brand equity will increase if the perception of product quality improves. Social media marketing activities have a positive and significant effect on *brand equity*. This means that if marketing activities on social media increase, *brand equity* will also increase.

This research contributes to understanding the influence of *authenticity*, perceived quality, and social media marketing activities in building *brand equity*, especially for high-tech products such as iPhones. For marketers, the results of this research can be used as a reference in designing marketing strategies that emphasize brand authenticity, high product quality, and effective marketing activities on social media. Companies also need to review their *influencer marketing* strategies to ensure that influencers provide accurate and trustworthy information about the product. Suggestions for future research are to expand the sample and the context of the study to test whether the same results apply to other brands and industries and explore additional factors that may affect *brand equity*.

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