



## Influence brand awareness and brand association on brand equity: Mediation of trust and brand loyalty in Kentucky Fried Chicken in East Java, Indonesia

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to empirically prove how trust and loyalty mediate the effect of brand awareness and association on the brand equity of Kentucky Fried Chicken in East Java. The research sample consists of 200 customers, and data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling. The results of the study show that brand awareness and associations have an effect on trust, loyalty, and brand equity. Trust and brand loyalty are found to mediate the influence of brand awareness and associations on brand equity. These findings contribute to the development of consumer brand relationship theory, which suggests that an emotional connection between fast food brands and customers can lead to strong brand equity. In the case of KFC, brand equity is strengthened through brand awareness and association, which in turn create trust and brand loyalty. The implications of these results for KFC management in East Java are that they should focus on increasing the popularity of the KFC brand through content marketing, sponsoring various activities, and using endorsers to ensure that customers always remember KFC as a fast-food brand. KFC outlets in East Java consistently maintain the quality of their products and always maintain good relationships with customers, so that customers are willing to recommend KFC to others.

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## 1. Introduction

Business is growing more rapidly in the age of globalization, which is characterized by an increase in the level of fierce competition between businesses, including fast food restaurants. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the United States entered the industrial period, long working hours and few breaks for many employees led to the early emergence of fast-food restaurants. This is the reason why many people switched to fast food, such as fried chicken, nuggets, burgers, and sausages. Some of the fast-food restaurants that originated in the United States include KFC, McDonald, Texas Chicken, Pizza Hut, Burger King, Roy Allen & Frank Wright A&W, and Wendy's. The development of fast-food outlets has also spread to Southeast Asia, with trademarks such as Pepper Luch and Ajisen Ramen in Singapore, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), California Fried Chicken (CFC), and Richeese Factory in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, there are many fast-food restaurants, which leads to intense competition over product quality. The competition among fast food like KFC, CFC, McDonald's, Texas Chicken, and A&W is particularly fierce, as these companies are vying for the best place in the eyes of the general public and their clientele. Accurate poll results are compiled by the Top Brand Award, a prestigious event that serves as an indicator of consumer awareness of fast-food brands. Table 1 shows the Top Brand Gen-Z Index findings for the Fast-Food Restaurant category in 2021 and 2022:

Table 1 shows the results of the Top Brand Gen-Z Index for 2021 and 2022 in the Fast-food restaurant category, KFC is ranked number two under McDonald's. This phenomenon shows that KFC's brand equity as a fast-food chain is still below that of MC Donald's. This phenomenon is interesting for further research related to KFC's brand equity as fast food chain. Kotler and Keller (2012) revealed that brands that have value can create brand equity, which has an impact on the superiority of the brand when compared to other brands.

Table 1. Top brand Gen-Z index for 2021 and 2022.

No	Brand	TBI (%) 2021	TBI (%) 2022
1	MC Donald's	30.5%	30.7%
2	KFC	28.5%	30.5%
3	HokBen	10.1%	10.8%
4	Burger King	9.1%	9.6%
5	Pizza Hut	5.7%	5.2%

Source: Top Brand Award, 2021 and 2022.

The brand will have high equity if the customer has a high level of awareness of the brand. The role of brand awareness on overall brand equity depends on the extent to which the level of awareness is achieved by a brand (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Previous studies by Edo Rajh (2005), Kim, Kim, Kim, Kim, and Kang (2008); Severi and Ling (2013), Dib and Alhaddad (2014); Alhaddad (2015), and Shabbir, Khan, and Khan (2017) have proved that brand awareness contributes to an increase in brand equity. However, Bravo Gil, Fraj Andrés, and Martinez Salinas (2007) and Tong and Hawley (2009) have reported different results, indicating that brand awareness does not necessarily contribute to an increase in brand equity.

The increase in brand equity occurs because of the role of brand associations. Sasmita & Suki, (2015) revealed that the higher the brand association, the more the brand will be remembered by customers and the brand will have power. Cheng and Hsui (2001) argue that brand associations can provide or create value by assisting the information retrieval process, differentiating brands, providing reasons to buy, and creating positive attitudes/feelings. Brand associations are a core part of building strong brand equity (Musekiwa, Chiguvu, & Hugo, 2013). Cheng and Hsui (2001) and Tong and Hawley (2009) found evidence that brand associations contribute to an increase in brand equity, while by Bravo Gil et al. (2007) found different results.

The findings of previous studies on the influence of brand awareness and brand associations on brand equity have shown inconsistent results, which has led to a research gap. These results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Research gaps.

Information	Researcher	Findings
There are different findings of influence on brand awareness to brand equity.	Edo Rajh (2005); Kim et al. (2008); Severi and Ling (2013); Dib and Alhaddad (2014); Alhaddad (2015) and Shabbir et al. (2017)	Brand awareness affects brand equity.
	Bravo Gil et al. (2007) and Tong and Hawley (2009)	Brand awareness has no effect on brand equity.
There are different findings on the influence of brand association on brand equity.	Cheng and Hsui (2001) and Tong and Hawley (2009)	Brand association has an effect on brand equity.
	Bravo Gil et al. (2007); Sasmita and Suki (2015) and Sucahyo (2017)	Brand association has no effect on brand equity.

By analyzing the variables that can mediate the effect of brand awareness and brand associations on brand equity, namely trust and brand loyalty, this study can fill the research gap by further examining the effect of brand awareness and brand associations on brand equity. The use of these two mediating variables is novel in this study. The development of consumer brand relationship theory and brand equity theory by Aaker (1997) states that brand equity is formed from four elements – namely brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty – which serves as the basis for the relationship between brand awareness and brand associations to brand equity, mediated by trust and brand loyalty.

Consumer brand relationships, according to Bouhleb, Mzoughi, Hadji, and Slimane (2011) refer to interactions between a brand and its consumers that can result in a powerful brand identity. From a business standpoint, as per Morgan (2000), businesses can increase their market share and competitive advantage by building strong brands. Companies create products and foster relationships with customers through their brands. Veloutsou (2007) and Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells (2015) claim that a brand that is frequently used and bought by consumers and which fosters consumer trust has a special relationship with society.

Marketing should be able to establish and maintain strong emotional connections with customers in order to win over their trust in the company. Customers' awareness of the brand allows for the development of this strong emotional connection, which must be consistently maintained over a prolonged period of time. Previous studies by Dib and Alhaddad (2014); El Naggar and Bendary (2017); Kusumajaya and Semuel (2014), and Dib and Alhaddad (2014) have all shown that brand awareness affects brand confidence.

Brand association can boost consumer confidence in a product or service in addition to raising brand awareness. According to French and Smith (2013), the core of decision-making is brand association. Some consumers use brand association to process, organize, and retrieve information in their memories as well as to

help them make purchasing choices. Brand associations have the strength and will get stronger with increasing consumption experience with the brand, which in turn contributes to customers trusting the brand. [Muhadjir and Rahmawati \(2009\)](#) and [El Nagggar and Bendary \(2017\)](#) have concluded that brand associations have a significant effect on customer trust in brands.

Customer trust in the brand is the customer's willingness to take the risks associated with the purchased brand. Customers hope that the purchased brand they purchased will provide positive and profitable results ([Lau & Lee, 1999](#)). Under these conditions, customer trust in a brand can increase brand equity because it refers to the customer's knowledge and experience of the brand ([Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Aleman, & Yague-Guillen, 2003](#)). The role of brand trust in increasing brand equity has been proven through the results of empirical studies conducted by [Ahmed, Rizwan, Ahmad, and Haq \(2014\)](#) and [Liao \(2015\)](#) which demonstrate that brand trust has a significant effect on brand equity.

Customer loyalty to the company can be influenced by the degree of consumer brand awareness. Customers are more likely to choose a company with a high level of brand awareness when making purchases, which will foster loyalty ([Lu, Gursoy, & Lu, 2015](#)). Brand awareness has the largest overall impact on brand loyalty, according to [Peng \(2006\)](#). Customers with strong brand knowledge are more likely to remain brand loyal ([Chi, Yeh, & Yang, 2009](#)). Brand awareness has been shown to affect brand allegiance by [Bravo Gil et al. \(2007\)](#); [Dhurup, Mafini, and Dumasi \(2014\)](#), and [Akhtar, Siddiqi, Ashraf, and Latif \(2016\)](#).

Brand associations can foster consumer brand devotion. Brand association is linked to the memories that customers have of a brand, whether they are favorable or unfavorable ([Hossien, Ali, & Mehdi, 2012](#)). An effective brand connection will be somewhat powerful, and linkages to a brand will be more powerful if they are founded on a variety of interactions or outward manifestations. Brand association does affect brand allegiance, according to research by [Bravo Gil et al. \(2007\)](#), and [Alexandris, Douka, Papadopoulos, and Kaltsatou \(2008\)](#).

Customer loyalty to a company is measured by brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is defined by [Mowen and Minor \(2012\)](#) as the degree to which a customer has a favorable mindset toward a brand, is committed to a specific brand, and plans to continue purchasing it in the future. According to [Marshall \(2010\)](#), brand loyalty is a concept where businesses emphasize either constructing or maintaining customer visits over time in order to increase brand loyalty. Because high brand loyalty will generate equity, brand loyalty becomes the core of the formation of brand equity, as demonstrated by [Bravo Gil et al. \(2007\)](#) and other researchers. [Tong and Hawley \(2009\)](#) also demonstrated the impact of brand devotion on brand equity.

This research aims to reassess the impact of brand awareness and brand associations on brand equity by examining the roles of trust and brand loyalty, in response to the inconsistent findings of earlier empirical studies. The study will utilize a unified model to investigate these relationships.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Consumer Brand Relationships*

According to [Duncan \(2008\)](#), a successful brand must have high equity in the market and be able to provide significant added value to its target market. According to [Moriarty et al. \(2015\)](#), a brand relationship is the bond that exists between the consumer and the brand owned by the company. [Schultz and Schultz \(2003\)](#) revealed that consumer brand relationship is the emotional relationship between consumers and the brands they use or interact with. This relationship can be characterized by the level of consumer attachment to the brand as well as their loyalty to the brand. [Bouhleb et al. \(2011\)](#) state that consumer brand relationships can have a positive impact on consumer purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. Customers who have a good relationship with a company are more likely to choose it again when purchasing similar goods and to refer it to others. Therefore, cultivating consumer business relationships and building a strong brand can help businesses boost consumer trust and develop long-lasting brand loyalty.

Some consumers can develop strong emotional connections with brands that are able to such relationships ([Bouhleb et al., 2011](#)). [Veloutsou \(2007\)](#) explains that consumers can form an attachment to more than one brand in the same product category, as long as the brand is familiar to them. This condition is similar to human relationships, where a bond cannot be formed or developed if there is no prior knowledge of the other person.

### *2.2. Brand Equity*

Company equity, according to [Kotler and Keller \(2012\)](#) is the added value a company provides in the goods or services it creates. Consumer perceptions of brands, such as brand recognition, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, are what determine brand equity. The higher the brand equity of a product or service, the higher the possibility for consumers to choose and buy that product or service. Brand equity can also help companies improve their brand image and provide a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market.

According to [Morgan \(2000\)](#), a strong brand enables businesses to effectively manage their assets, boost cash flow, increase market share, establish premium prices, cut costs associated with promotions, boost sales, keep stability, and boost competitive advantage. Promotions for brands that are well-known to consumers are

more successful (Bravo Gil et al., 2007). According to Aaker (1997), brand equity is composed of four factors: brand loyalty, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand recognition.

Bravo Gil et al. (2007) suggest that perceived value, perceived quality, image, trustworthiness, and dedication all contribute to brand equity. According to Tong and Hawley (2009), preference for the desired product, which goes beyond mere functionality, is a measure of brand equity when other companies offer similar products. Loureiro (2013) proposes that the sign brand equity is the satisfaction of consumers with the product, their loyalty to the brand, and their reluctance to switch to other brands. Hou and Wonglorsaichon (2014) measure indicators of brand equity, such as choosing a brand's products over others, preferring a brand's products even though other brands have the same features, and preferring a brand's products even though other brands may be better.

### *2.3. Brand Loyalty*

According to Schiffman, Hansen, and Kanuk (2011), brand loyalty refers to a consumer's propensity to consistently choose or use goods or services from a specific brand and maintain a long-term relationship with that brand. According to Mowen and Minor (2012), brand loyalty is a state in which consumers have a strong preference for and loyalty to a particular brand. Brand loyalty can be established through a positive consumer experience with the brand, either directly through the use of the product or indirectly through the influence of the social environment or advertising. In business, brand loyalty is very important because it can help increase sales and foster loyal customers, which can, in turn, help build a positive and sustainable brand reputation.

According to Schiffman et al. (2011), loyal customers tend to have long-term relationships with brands or companies and will remain, customers, even if cheaper or better alternatives exist. Tong and Hawley (2009) reveal that brand loyalty can be measured by consumer loyalty to the brand, satisfaction with the brand, and recommendations. Bilgin (2018) measures brand loyalty through customer satisfaction with the brand, choosing the brand as the first option, and recommending the brand to others.

### *2.4. Brand Awareness*

According to Lin and Kao (2004), brand awareness refers to consumers' capacity to identify, recall, and be aware of specific brands as well as the characteristics connected to them. Building brand awareness requires a strong understanding of brand recognition. Brand recognition is regarded by Kotler and Keller (2012) as being crucial to marketing. Higher brand awareness increases the likelihood that a brand will be chosen during the purchasing decision-making process, which eventually results in more sales, lower costs, and higher profits for the company. As a result, higher brand awareness will have an impact on the increase in brand equity (Killa, 2008).

Sasmita and Suki (2015) state that brand awareness is measured through indicators such as being aware of brands that appear on social media, recognizing brands compared to other brands, knowing brands are visible, having brand characteristics that appear on social media come to mind quickly, and being able to quickly remember symbols or logos of the brand. Similarly, according to Bilgin (2018) brand awareness is measured through indicators such as always being aware of the brand, being aware of brand characteristics, and always being able to remember the brand logo.

### *2.5. Brand Associations*

Brand association, according to Kotler and Keller (2012) is the link that consumers make between brands and specific qualities like quality, price, image, benefits, and other product characteristics. Consumer perception, experience, and brand understanding all contribute to brand association. The favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations are all markers of brand associations, according to Keller's research from 2003. According to Sasmita and Suki (2015), brand association is evaluated by signs that companies with social media presence have a distinct personality. This brand stands out from other competing brands, customers trust the company's social media presence, they are acquainted with the brand, and there is a good reason to choose this brand over a competitor's social media presence.

### *2.6. Brand Trusts*

Mowen and Minor (2012) define brand trust as a consumer's perception of the reliability, safety, and performance of a brand that influences consumer attitudes toward the brand. In this case, a brand trust includes consumer confidence that the brand can provide benefits and meet customer expectations. Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) stated that brand trust is consumer confidence in the brand's ability to deliver the promised value consistently. This includes consumer confidence in quality, performance, reliability, and brand integrity.

Brand trust is defined by a number of factors, including competency (the ability of trusted parties to carry out the needs of the trusting party), benevolence (attention and motivation that is trusted to act in accordance with those who trust), and consistency of the trusted party's behavior, according to Gurviez and Korchia (2002). Luarn and Lin (2003) mention that a brand trust is a specific number of these factors. While

Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán (2005) found that brand reliability and brand intentions are indicators of brand trust.

### **3. Hypothesis Development**

Brand awareness is the level of understanding or awareness that consumers have of a particular brand. This includes consumers' understanding of the characteristics, benefits, and brand image associated with the product or service provided by the brand. A brand will have more clout if consumers are more conscious of it. Brand knowledge has been found to have an impact on brand equity, according to Edo Rajh (2005); Kim et al. (2008); Severi and Ling (2013); Dib and Alhaddad (2014); Alhaddad (2015) and Shabbir et al. (2017). The study hypothesis is as follows, and it is based on the findings of earlier studies:

*H1: Brand awareness has a significant effect on brand equity.*

Brand association is a concept that refers to the emotional connection or connection built by consumers between brands with certain attributes. Brand associations can be product characteristics, brand images, or feelings associated with the brand (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Cheng and Hsui (2001) and Tong and Hawley (2009) found evidence that brand associations influence brand equity. Based on the results of previous studies, the research hypothesis is as follows:

*H2: Brand association has a significant effect on brand equity.*

Brand trust is the belief or opinion held by customers towards a brand or product. This belief can manifest as convictions regarding the worth, performance, or other brand-related characteristics of a product (Delgado & Munuera, 2001). As demonstrated by Kusumajaya and Semuel (2014), Dib and Alhaddad (2014), and El Nagggar and Bendary (2017), brand awareness has an impact on brand confidence. The study hypothesis is as follows, and it is based on the findings of earlier studies:

*H3: Brand awareness has a significant effect on brand trust.*

According to Schiffman et al. (2011), loyal customers are customers who tend to choose and buy the same product or brand repeatedly, even though there are alternative products or other brands available on the market. These loyal customers usually have a strong belief in certain brands or products, so customers feel comfortable and confident in choosing these products or brands. Bravo Gil et al. (2007); Dhurup et al. (2014) and Akhtar et al. (2016) proved that brand awareness has an effect on brand loyalty. Based on the results of previous studies, the research hypothesis is as follows:

*H4: Brand awareness has a significant effect on brand loyalty.*

According to French and Smith (2013), brand association refers to the mental relationship between a brand and certain attributes such as product characteristics, brand image, or feelings associated with the brand. Muhadjir and Rahmawati (2009) and El Nagggar and Bendary (2017) concluded that brand associations have a significant effect on consumer trust in brands. Based on the results of previous studies, the research hypothesis is as follows:

*H5: Brand association has a significant effect on brand trust.*

Brand associations are associations that consumers make between companies and particular characteristics like quality, price, lifestyle, trust, and brand image. Even if other brands offer similar goods or services, consumers who have a favorable association with one brand are more likely to choose it (Hossien et al., 2012). Brand association does affect brand allegiance, as demonstrated by studies conducted by Alexandris et al. (2008) and Bravo Gil et al. (2007). The study hypothesis is as follows, and it is based on the findings of earlier studies:

*H6: Brand association has a significant effect on brand loyalty.*

Consumer trust in brands refers to a customer's willingness to take risks associated with a purchased brand and their expectation that the brand will yield positive and profitable results for them (Lau & Lee, 1999). Under these conditions, it can increase brand equity, because trust in a brand refers to consumer knowledge and experience of the brand (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Ahmed et al. (2014) and Liao (2015) proved that brand trust has a significant effect on brand equity. Based on the results of previous studies, the research hypothesis is as follows:

*H7: Brand trust has a significant effect on brand equity.*

According to Mowen and Minor (2012), the extent to which customers show a favorable attitude toward a brand, have a commitment to a particular brand, and plan to buy it in the future, constitutes brand loyalty. Brand trust is an important component of brand equity. Brand trust refers to consumers' beliefs about the ability of brands to deliver on their promises and expectations consistently. In this case, brand trust plays an important role in forming long-term relationships between brands and consumers (Marshall, 2010). The study conducted by Bravo Gil et al. (2007); Tong and Hawley (2009) and Shabbir et al. (2017) proved that brand loyalty has an influence on brand equity.

*H8: Brand loyalty has a significant effect on brand equity.*

Brand trust can be a mediator between brand awareness and brand equity because brand trust plays an important role in forming long-term relationships between brands and consumers, and also influences customer loyalty and brand image. Therefore, to build strong brand equity, brands need to have high brand awareness and also build trust. This conception is the result of the development of a study conducted by

Kusumajaya and Samuel (2014); Dib and Alhaddad (2014) and El Naggar and Bendary (2017) that brand awareness contributes to trust and has an impact on increasing brand equity (Ahmed et al., 2014; Liao, 2015) Based on the results of previous research, the research hypothesis is as follows:

*H9: Brand trust mediates the effect of brand awareness on brand equity.*

Brand associations have the power to influence consumers in purchasing decisions and shape their perceptions of brands. However, brand trust also plays an important role in building long-term relationships between brands and consumers. Brand trust refers to consumers' beliefs in the ability of brands to consistently deliver on its promises and expectations. It can serve as a mediator in the relationship between brand associations on brand equity. While brand associations may influence consumers in making purchasing decisions and building brand perceptions, brand trust is crucial in fostering loyalty. Studies by Muhadjir and Rahmawati (2009) and El Naggar and Bendary (2017) have demonstrated that brand association has a significant effect on trust, which in turn, has an impact on brand equity, as shown by Ahmed et al. (2014) and Liao (2015). Based on these findings, the research hypothesis is as follows:

*H10: Brand trust mediates the influence of brand associations on brand equity.*

Brand loyalty can play an important role in mediating the influence of brand awareness on brand equity, when consumers have high brand awareness, they may tend to choose the brand consistently, especially if they are satisfied with their experience using the brand's product. In this case, brand loyalty can mediate the effect of brand awareness on brand equity. Bravo Gil et al. (2007); Dhurup et al. (2014) and Akhtar et al. (2016) concluded that brand awareness has an effect on brand loyalty and impact on brand equity (Tong & Hawley, 2009). The research hypothesis is as follows:

*H11: Brand loyalty mediates the effect of brand awareness on brand equity.*

If consumers have a positive brand association with a particular brand, they are likely to choose that brand consistently and develop loyalty to it. Customer loyalty can then mediate the effect of brand associations on brand equity by enhancing brand image and strengthening consumers' emotional bonds with the brands. However, it is important to remember brands must consistently meet consumer expectations and reinforce positive experiences to strengthen the effect of brand associations on brand equity through brand loyalty. If a brand fails to meet consumer expectations or provides a bad experience, brand loyalty and the influence of brand associations on brand equity can be impaired. Therefore, it is important for brands to build a positive brand image and meet consumer expectations consistently to strengthen brand loyalty and brand equity. Studies by Bravo Gil et al. (2007) and Alexandris et al. (2008) have shown that brand association creates brand loyalty and has an impact on brand equity (Bravo Gil et al., 2007; Tong & Hawley, 2009). Based on the results of previous research, the research hypothesis is as follows:

*H12: Brand loyalty mediates the effect of brand associations on brand equity.*

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1. Population and Research Sample*

The study's population consists of KFC customers from various regencies and cities of East Java, including Banyuwangi, Jember, Probolinggo, Pasuruan, Mojokerto, Sidoarjo, Surabaya, Malang, Kediri, and Madiun. These locations were selected because KFC restaurants are available in these regencies and cities of East Java.

Ferdinand (2006) suggests that when the population is infinite, the sample size should be calculated by multiplying the number of indicators from five different factors by a range of five to ten. Applying this rule, a sample size of 200 KFC customers was selected for this study, using a simple random sampling technique. To avoid sampling errors, the following criteria were established for the target community members: they must be decision-makers, KFC customers, and at least 17 years old, as they are considered adults and can provide independent responses.

### *4.2. Operational Definition of Research Variables*

The variables in this study were measured through respondents' responses using a Likert scale. Each answer to a question was assigned a weight as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

### *4.3. Data Analysis Method*

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for data analysis. To determine whether a model is feasible, a variety of indices were used to assess the degree of conformity between the hypothesized model and the data provided. Once the model satisfied the criteria, the critical ratio (CR)-based hypothesis was tested using a probability value. (p). If the value of p is less than or equal to 0.05, there is a significant impact; otherwise, there is no significant effect. The Baron and Kenny (1986) method was used to test if a variable could serve as an intervening variable, and to determine if there was full or partial mediation of the mediation variable. Table 3 provides operational definitions of variables used in the study, including the measurement of each variable's indicators and items. the Likert scale was used to measure the variables studied through respondents'

responses, with each answer to a question weighted as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

**Table 3. Variables, indicators and instruments.**

Variable	Indicator	Items	Source
Brand awareness	Brand recognition	1. Instantly recognize KFC by looking at the logo	Aaker (1997); Sasmita and Suki (2015) and Bilgin (2018)
	Remember the brand	2. The first fast food brand that comes to mind is KFC	
	Brand recognition	3. KFC is a fast food brand that already has a (Popular) name in the eyes of customers	
	Brand characteristics	4. KFC is the best fast food brand compared to other fast food brands	
Brand association	Product benefits	1. The benefits obtained are equivalent to the costs incurred	Aaker (1997); Keller (2003) and Sasmita and Suki (2015)
	Credibility	2. KFC is produced by a company that has high credibility (Trusted)	
	Lifestyle	3. KFC is fast food that suits the lifestyle of urban communities	
	product class	4. KFC is a quality ready-to-eat food compared to other brands	
Brand trust	Integrity	1. The raw materials used by KFC are of high quality	Luarn and Lin (2003); Gurviez and Korchia (2002) and Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán (2005)
	Competence	2. KFC has the ability to process the menu served	
	Reliability	3. KFC is always consistent in the quality of the products it offers	
	Attention	4. KFC always pays attention to the quality of the products offered	
Brand loyalty	Brand loyalty	1. Willing to come back to KFC	Mowen and Minor (2012); Tong and Hawley (2009) and Bilgin (2018)
	Brand commitment	2. Even though the price is more expensive, I will still choose KFC compared to other fast food	
	Positive attitude towards the brand	3. Say positive things about KFC to others	
	Recommendation	4. Would recommend KFC to others	
Brand equity	Perception of quality	1. The quality of KFC products does not change from time to time.	Bravo Gil et al. (2007) and Hou and Wonglorsaichon (2014)
	Perceived value	2. Buying KFC products increases social value	
	Image	3. KFC has a brand image that matches product quality.	
	Pride	4. Feel proud to be a part of KFC customers	

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Characteristics of Respondents

The characteristics of KFC customers based on gender, age, education, and occupation are described as follows:

According to Table 4, it is clear that KFC patrons are primarily female, between the ages of 21 and 30, with an S-1 level of education, and employed as students. This data demonstrates that the majority of KFC customers are young people who prefer fast food. Young people typically enjoy a lifestyle trend to move quickly and freely, which may contribute to their preference for fast food like KFC due to its convenience and quick service. This situation may explain the high interest of young people in purchasing food from KFC.

### 5.2. Inferential Statistical Analysis

#### 5.2.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The results of measurements on indicators that can form variable brand awareness, brand association, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand quality with Confirmatory Factor Analysis are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Characteristics of respondents.**

Individual characteristics	Number of respondents	%
By gender		
Man	68	34
Woman	132	66
By age (Years)		
<20	30	15
21-30	85	42.5

Individual characteristics	Number of respondents	%
31-40	65	32.5
41-50	15	7.5
> 50	5	15
Based on education		
Senior high school	44	22
S1	108	54
S2	38	19
S3	10	5
Work		
Senior high school	55	27.5
College student	97	48.5
Private employees	34	17
Civil servant	14	7

Table 5. Factor loading ( $\lambda$ ) measuring research variables.

Indicators and variables	FL	CR	P.S
Brand recognition --> Brand awareness	0.753	9,749	0.000
Remember the brand --> Brand awareness	0.768	9,915	0.000
Brand recognition --> Brand awareness	0.750	9,814	0.000
Brand characteristics --> Brand awareness	0.754	-	-
Product benefits --> Brand association	0.544	5,139	0.000
Credibility --> Brand association	0.832	6,191	0.000
Lifestyle --> Brand association	0.889	6,219	0.000
product class --> Brand association	0.455	-	-
Integrity --> Brand trust	0.813	-	-
Competence --> Brand trust	0.816	11,480	0.000
Reliability --> Brand trust	0.701	9,967	0.000
Attention --> Brand trust	0.735	10,423	0.000
Brand loyalty --> Brand loyalty	0.755	4,894	0.000
Brand commitment --> Brand loyalty	0.759	4,908	0.000
Positive attitude towards the brand --> Brand loyalty	0.763	4,816	0.000
Recommendation --> Brand loyalty	0.386	-	-
Perception of quality --> Brand equity	0.774	-	-
Perceived value --> Brand equity	0.748	10,148	0.000
Image --> Brand equity	0.790	10,520	0.000
Pride --> Brand equity	0.756	10,261	0.000

The indicators that make up the variables of brand awareness, brand association, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand equity have a significance value (p) of 0.05, which indicates that all of these indicators are crucial in forming brand awareness, brand association, brand trust, loyalty, and brand equity. This explanation is supported by Table 5.

The findings can be explained by the fact that customers become aware of the KFC brand if they are able to recall the KFC brand well. This is supported by the fact that KFC is the first fast food brand that comes to mind when customers think of fast food, which is a key indicator in creating brand associations. These findings can be explained by the fact that consumers associate the KFC name with ready-to-eat foods that fit urban lifestyles, which is another factor that contributes to brand association. Furthermore, competence is the most common type of company trust that consumers have in a company. These findings can be explained by the fact that consumers trust the KFC brand if it demonstrates competency, as shown by its ability to handle the menu.

The indications of a consumer's favorable opinion of the main brand and the development of brand loyalty can be explained by the fact that customers who have a positive attitude toward the KFC brand and who spread that positive attitude to others will be devoted to the restaurant chain. Brand wealth that is dominated by image indicators can be explained by the fact that KFC will have high brand equity if it is able to provide a good image that aligns with the product quality as indicated by the KFC brand.

### 5.2.2. SEM Analysis Results

Test results with *Structural Equation Modelling* (SEM), presented in Figure 1.



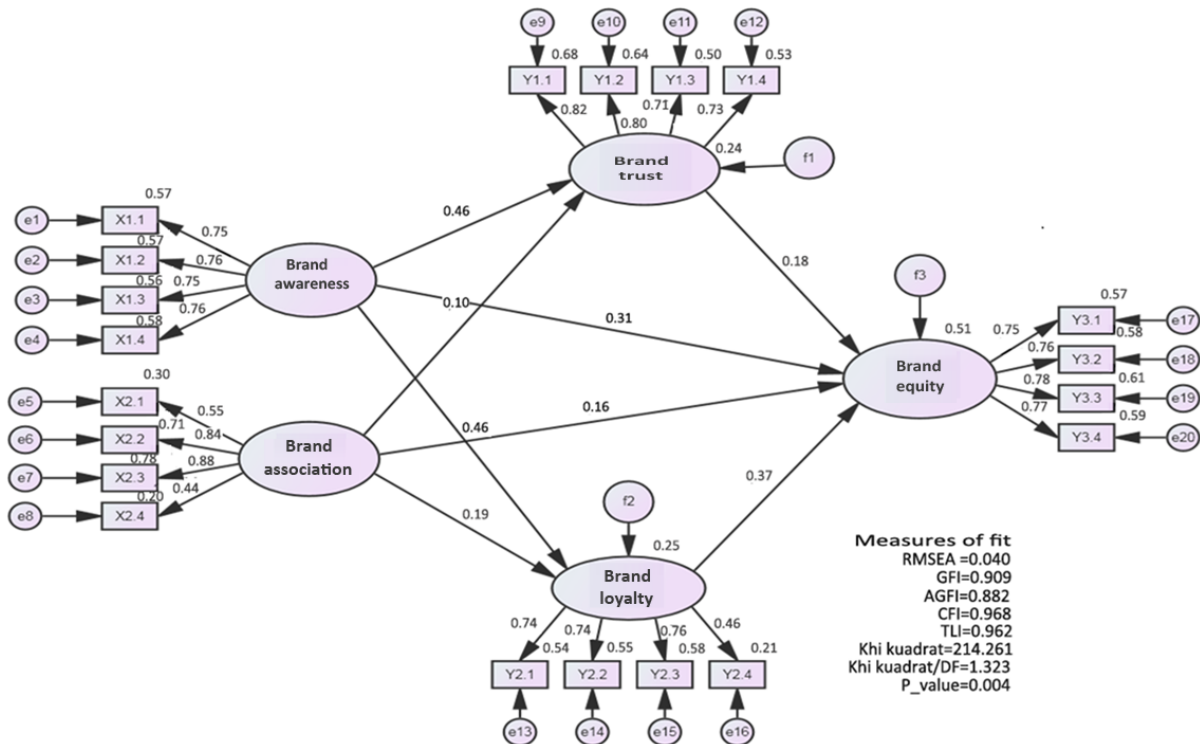


Figure 1. The results the goodness of fit overall model test.

The final model test results presented in Figure 1 were evaluated based on the goodness of fit indices criteria in Table 6.

Table 6. Critical value goodness of fit index.

Goodness of fit index	Cut-off value	Model results	Information
X2 – Chi square	Expected small	214.261	Marginal models
Sign probability	≥ 0.05	0.004	Marginal models
CMIN/DF	≤ 2.00	1.323	Good
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.909	Good
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.882	Marginal models
TLI	≥ 0.95	0.962	Good
CFI	≥ 0.95	0.968	Good
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.040	Good

Note: CMIN/DF: The minimum sample discrepancy function by degree of freedom; GFI: Goodness of fit index; AGFI: Adjusted goodness of fit index; TLI: Tucker Lewis's index; CFI: Comparative fit index; RMSEA: The root mean square error of approximation.

Based on the evaluation of the proposed model, it is apparent that the overall evaluation of the construct did not yield a value above the critical threshold.

5.2.3. Hypothesis Testing Results

The results of testing the direct effect on each hypothesis are listed in Table 7:

Table 7. Results of regression weight analysis.

Connection	Path coefficient	CR	P-values	Information
Brand awareness --> Brand equity	0.309	3,400	0.000	Significant
Brand association --> Brand equity	0.164	2,210	0.027	Significant
Brand awareness --> Brand trust	0.457	5,437	0.000	Significant
Brand awareness --> Brand loyalty	0.461	3,905	0.000	Significant
Brand association --> Brand trust	0.179	2,213	0.027	Significant
Brand association --> Brand loyalty	0.188	2,140	0.032	Significant
Brand trust --> Brand equity	0.179	2,225	0.026	Significant
Brand loyalty --> Brand equity	0.366	3,714	0.000	Significant

The effect of brand association on brand equity produces a Cr value of 2,210 with a p-value of 0.027. Brand trust produces a Cr value of 2,213 with a p-value of 0.027, and brand loyalty produces a Cr value of 2,140 with

a p-value of 0.032. Because the p-value is smaller than the statistical significance at  $\alpha = 5\%$ , the hypothesis that brand association has a significant effect on brand equity, brand trust, and brand loyalty can be accepted.

The influence of brand trust on brand equity produces a Cr value of 2,225 with a p-value of 0.026, and the effect of brand loyalty on brand equity produces a Cr value of 3,714 with a p-value of 0.000. Because the p-value is smaller than the statistical significance at  $\alpha = 5\%$ , the hypothesis which states that brand trust and brand loyalty have a significant effect on brand equity can be accepted.

The results of the analysis of the role of brand trust as mediating the influence of brand awareness and associations on brand equity can be seen in [Table 8](#).

**Table 8.** The effect of brand awareness and brand associations on brand equity by mediating brand trust.

Connection	Path coefficient	CR	P-values	Information
Brand awareness --> Brand trust	0.444a	5,248	0.000	Significant
Brand trust --> Brand equity	0.297b	3,514	0.000	Significant
Brand awareness --> Brand equity	0.419c	4,633	0.000	Significant
Brand awareness --> Brand equity	0.551d	6,241	0.000	Significant
Brand association --> Brand trust	0.182a	2,087	0.037	Significant
Brand trust --> Brand equity	0.449b	5,404	0.000	Significant
Brand association --> Brand equity	0.187c	2,271	0.023	Significant
Brand association --> Brand equity	0.267d	2,897	0.004	Significant

**Note:** (a), (b) and (c) are the results of the path coefficients and the overall model, and (d) are the results of the path coefficient of the overall model without any mediating variables. CR = Critical ratio.

Based on the results of the mediation test, brand awareness has an effect on brand trust, resulting in a path coefficient value. Brand awareness, which is controlled by a brand trust, is able to influence brand equity with a coefficient value of 0.419 (c). The coefficient value is smaller than the effect of brand awareness on equity brand without any mediating variable of brand trust, with a coefficient value of 0.551 (d). These results suggest that brand trust partially mediates the indirect effect of brand awareness on brand equity.

Based on the results of the mediation test, brand associations have an effect on brand trust, with the path coefficient value of brand associations controlled by brand trust being able to influence brand equity with a coefficient value of 0.187 (c) and having a coefficient value that is smaller (decreasing) than the influence of brand associations on brand equity without the mediating variable brand trust, with a coefficient value of 0.267 (d). These results suggest that brand trust partially mediates the indirect effect of the influence of brand associations on brand equity. The results of the analysis of the role of brand loyalty as a mediator in the influence of brand awareness and associations on brand equity can be seen in [Table 9](#).

**Table 9.** The effect brand awareness and brand associations on brand equity by mediating brand loyalty.

Connection	Path coefficient	CR	P-values	Ket
Brand awareness --> Brand equity	0.450a	3,843	0.000	Significant
Brand loyalty --> Brand equity	0.449b	4,314	0.000	Significant
Brand awareness --> Brand equity	0.349c	4,028	0.000	Significant
Brand awareness --> Brand equity	0.551d	6,241	0.000	Significant
Brand association --> Brand equity	0.191a	2,039	0.041	Significant
Brand loyalty --> Brand equity	0.572b	4,911	0.000	Significant
Brand association --> Brand equity	0.157c	2,014	0.044	Significant
Brand association --> Brand equity	0.267d	2,897	0.004	Significant

**Note:** (a), (b) and (c) are the results of the path coefficients and the overall model, and (d) are the results of the path coefficient of the overall model without any mediating variables. CR = critical ratio.

Based on the results of the mediation test, the coefficient value of the brand awareness path that is controlled by brand loyalty is able to influence brand equity with a coefficient value of 0.349 (c). This coefficient value is smaller (decreasing) than the effect of brand awareness on brand equity in the absence of a mediating variable, brand loyalty, with a coefficient value of 0.551(d). These results suggest that brand loyalty partially mediates the indirect effect of brand awareness on brand equity.

Based on the results of the mediation test, the path coefficient value of brand association which is controlled by brand loyalty is able to influence brand equity with a coefficient value of 0.157 (c) which is smaller (decreases) than the effect of brand association on brand equity without the mediation variable, brand loyalty, with a coefficient value of 0.267 (d). Thus, it can be concluded that brand loyalty partially mediates the indirect effect of brand associations on brand equity.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Influence brand Awareness to Brand Equity

KFC is a well-known brand thanks to consumer knowledge, and the popularity of the KFC brand among Indonesians contributes to KFC's high brand equity. According to [Keller \(2003\)](#), a customer's continued brand

loyalty is an indication of their brand wealth. That is the ease with which customers can recall the word "KFC" as part of brand awareness affects the high brand equity that is reflected in KFC's brand image. This is consistent with its capacity to produce goods with a taste that is distinct from fried chicken options. According to Kotler and Gary (2014), brand equity has a favorable impact on differentiation and can be determined by how customers react to products or services. Brand equity can be defined as a brand's power to influence how customers react to the products or services being offered. This power can increase or reduce a brand's value.

According to the theoretical research by Kotler and Keller (2012), brand awareness is the ability of consumers to recognize companies under various circumstances, as demonstrated by their success in brand recognition or recall. Brand awareness reflects a prospective customer's capacity to identify and remember that a particular brand belongs to a certain brand category. The degree to which a brand's level of awareness is attained determines how important brand awareness is to overall brand equity (Sasmita & Suki, 2015).

According to Kotler and Keller (2012), building customer-based brand equity largely depends on brand recognition. Higher brand awareness will have a positive impact on the growth of brand equity because it increases the likelihood of a brand being chosen during the purchase decision-making process, which eventually results in higher sales, lower costs, and greater profits for the business (Killa, 2008). Brand awareness, as defined by Lin and Kao (2004), is the capacity of consumers (or potential customers) to recall (identify) or recognize (recall) that a brand is part of a specific product category. As a result, brand recognition and brand memory comprise brand awareness.

The findings of this research support earlier empirical studies that demonstrated how brand awareness affects brand equity, including those by Edo Rajh (2005); Kim et al. (2008); Severi and Ling (2013); Dib and Alhaddad (2014); Alhaddad (2015); and Shabbir et al. (2017). Because a brand has equity when consumers know and remember it more than other brands in a particular product class, brand awareness has an impact on brand equity. The extent to which a brand's level of awareness is achieved determines the part of brand awareness in overall brand equity. The more customers can recall or identify a brand, the more brand awareness they have.

### *6.2. Influence Brand Association on Brand Equity*

The rise in KFC's brand value can be attributed to its brand association. KFC has a consistent brand image that emphasizes product quality, such as its ability to offer products with a distinct taste beyond fried chicken. This consistency fits KFC's identity as a fast food brand that fits the lifestyle of urban communities. According to Kotler and Gary (2014), brand associations serve as the foundation for consumers' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. By linking different associations, consumers can create a lasting impression of the brand, also known as the brand image.

This idea is in line with the theoretical research presented by Sasmita and Suki (2015), who hypothesized that brand association is related to the positive and negative information that consumers have about a brand in their minds and that the stronger the brand association, the more likely consumers are to remember the brand. Building powerful brand equity begins with brand associations (Musekiwa et al., 2013). According to Cheng and Hsui (2001), brand associations can take many different forms and represent the qualities of the product. Brand associations can add or generate value by aiding in the information-gathering process, differentiating brands, providing justification for purchases, and fostering favorable attitudes and feelings.

The findings of this research support earlier empirical investigations by Cheng and Hsui (2001) and Tong and Hawley (2009) that found brand associations raise brand equity. Brand associations have an impact on brand equity because they assist customers in organizing and retrieving information that affects buying decisions and is one of the major causes of brand equity.

### *6.3. Influence brand Awareness to Brand Trust*

Customers' confidence in KFC as a fast food brand is a result of their brand awareness. This awareness is determined by KFC's ability to come to mind when customers think of fast food brands. In other words, the better consumers can recognize KFC's brand components, such as its name and logo, the better they can recall them. KFC's reputation for good-tasting chicken also contributes to its strong brand. KFC's ability to deliver on its promises and prioritise consumer needs is demonstrated through its products, such as its ability to manage its menu effectively.

This idea is in line with the theory put forth by Delgado and Munuera (2001), who claimed that brand trust is the capacity of a brand to be trusted (brand reliability), which arises from the customer's belief that a product is capable of fulfilling the promised value and brand intention based on the customer's belief that the brand is able to put the customer's interests first. According to Dib and Alhaddad (2014), a well-known brand that can potentially be trusted and whose quality can be justified as a form of brand confidence is one form of brand awareness.

The findings of this study support earlier empirical research conducted by Kusumajaya and Semuel (2014); Dib and Alhaddad (2014) and El Naggar and Bendary (2017), which suggest that brand awareness influences brand trust. To establish and maintain trust, marketing must create a positive emotional connection with consumers, and this connection is facilitated by brand awareness. Consistent efforts over time are necessary to sustain this connection.

#### *6.4. Effect of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty*

Customer loyalty to KFC, despite the price being higher than other fast food chains, is a result of the brand's high recognition among customers. KFC is often the first fast food chain that comes to their minds. Customers' loyalty to KFC has increased due to their ability to recognize brand components like the KFC brand name and logo, and are better able to recall the company's slogan "chicken is good". This strong recognition plays a critical role in building customer loyalty.

This idea is in line with the theory put forth by [Mowen and Minor \(2012\)](#), who defined brand loyalty as the degree to which a customer exhibits a favorable attitude toward a brand, has a commitment to a specific brand, and plans to purchase it in the future. According to research by [Schiffman et al. \(2011\)](#), loyal customers respond to a company more favorably than disloyal ones. Consumers are more likely to choose brands with high brand awareness when making purchases, and this will continue to influence consumer choices regarding repeat purchases. Repeat purchases are considered one aspect of customer loyalty ([Lu et al., 2015](#)). From [Peng's \(2006\)](#) perspective, brand knowledge has the greatest overall impact on brand loyalty.

The findings of this research support earlier empirical studies that show brand awareness influences brand loyalty, including those by [Bravo Gil et al. \(2007\)](#); [Dhurup et al. \(2014\)](#), and [Akhtar et al. \(2016\)](#). This means that a brand's level of consumer awareness can influence consumer loyalty to the brand because consumers are more likely to choose products from brands, they are familiar with when making purchases. This will also influence consumers' decisions to make repeat purchases, which is a sign of customer loyalty.

#### *6.5. The Influence of Brand Associations on Brand Trust*

Brand association is anything that is directly or indirectly linked to the customer's memory of the brand. Product attributes and benefits for customers are relevant associations because they provide reasons to buy, becoming the basis for building trust in the brand. KFC brand association includes a beneficial attribute namely that KFC is a fast food brand that suits the lifestyle of urban communities. This can be explained by the increasing need for ready-to-eat or fast food products, especially in urban communities that lead busy lives and prioritize fast and practical food preparation. Eating out has become a necessity due to the convenience and refreshing experience it offers. In urban communities, time is very valuable, so fast food has become a preferred alternative. Fast food has become a new culture and one of the choices of urban lifestyle.

The culture of consuming fast food in accordance with the lifestyle of urban communities has resulted in an increase in KFC brand associations. This increase in KFC brand associations has led to an increase in customer trust in the KFC brand. Customer trust is indicated by the brand's ability to be trusted (brand reliability), which comes from the customer's belief that the brand will provide positive results to customers. For example, KFC has the ability to process the menu served, and they adjust menus internationally to suit regional tastes.

This conception is in accordance with the theoretical study put forward by [French and Smith \(2013\)](#) that brand association is the core of decision making, and some consumers use it to process, organize and retrieve information in their memory, helping them make purchasing decisions. As consumers' consumption experience with the brand increases, the strength of brand association also increases, which leads to consumers trusting the brand. The results of this study support previous empirical studies put forward by [Muhadjir and Rahmawati \(2009\)](#) and [El Naggat and Bendary \(2017\)](#), which concluded that brand associations have a significant effect on consumer trust in brands.

#### *6.6. The Influence of Brand Associations on Brand Loyalty*

Customers use brand memories as a foundation for their purchases and brand loyalty. A trademark is a collection of associations that are typically connected in various meaningful ways. Customers' memories of various associations can be connected to create a mental picture of the company (brand image). Brand loyalty is the promise to continually repurchase a good or service in the future. Customers who choose KFC despite the fact that the price is higher than other fast food chains demonstrate their commitment to having a positive mindset toward the KFC brand.

The commitment of customers to continue to choose KFC despite its higher prices compared to other fast food chains is formed due to the association of the KFC brand as a fast food brand that fits the lifestyle of urban communities. This can be explained by the fact that in urban areas, people have busy schedules that have caused a change in eating patterns, where eating out has become a necessity, not only for efficiency but also for refreshing. For people in big cities, KFC remains the preferred choice even though its prices are higher than those of other fast food chains.

This idea is in line with the theoretical research put forth by [Hossien et al. \(2012\)](#), which claims that brand association is related to what consumers believe about the brand, whether positive or negative knowledge, connected to brain memory. There will be the strength to a strong brand connection, and a brand's linkage will be more powerful if it is founded on a variety of experiences or outward manifestations. The findings of this research support earlier empirical investigations by [Alexandris et al. \(2008\)](#) and [Bravo Gil et al. \(2007\)](#) that discovered evidence of a relationship between brand association and brand loyalty.

### *6.7. The Effect of Brand Trust on Brand Equity*

The enhancement of customer trust in KFC as a fast food brand is followed by an increase in KFC's brand equity, reflected in KFC's image that is in accordance with product quality, such as KFC's ability to process products with a distinctive taste like fried chicken. Kotler and Gary (2014) revealed that customer confidence in brands is due to the customer's closeness to the brand, whether it is due to advertising and brand popularity, brand credibility in the eyes of customers, and customer experience with the brand. A well-known and highly credible brand instils confidence in customers to choose the brand, and a brand with good credibility creates a great deal of trust in the brand.

This conception is in accordance with the theoretical study put forward by Lau and Lee (1999), which suggests that consumer trust in brands is demonstrated by the customer's willingness to take risks associated with the brand purchased. This situation arises because customers expect that the brand, they purchase will offer positive and beneficial outcomes. Such a situation can increase brand equity because trust in a brand is related to consumer knowledge and experience of the brand (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). The findings of this study support previous empirical studies conducted by Ahmed et al. (2014) and Liao (2015), which found that brand trust has a significant effect on brand equity.

### *6.8. Effect of Brand Loyalty on Brand Equity*

Customer loyalty to the KFC brand is shown by still choosing KFC, even though the price is more expensive than other fast food, which contributes to an increase in KFC's brand equity reflected in KFC's brand image that is in accordance with product quality, such as KFC's ability to process products that have a distinctive taste for fried chicken. This idea is in line with the theory put forth by Mowen and Minor (2012), who defined brand loyalty as the degree to which a customer exhibits a favorable attitude toward a brand, has a commitment to a specific brand, and plans to purchase it in the future.

According to Marshall (2010), brand loyalty is a concept in which businesses place emphasis on fostering or sustaining long-term customer visits in order to increase brand loyalty. As a result, brand loyalty becomes the core of forming brand equity because high brand loyalty leads to equity and a premium brand. The findings of this research support earlier empirical investigations by Bravo Gil et al. (2007); Tong and Hawley (2009) and Shabbir et al. (2017) that brand equity is influenced by brand loyalty.

### *6.9. Effect of Brand Awareness on Brand Equity through Brand Trust*

Brand trust is able to mediate the effect of brand awareness on brand equity. These results can be explained by the fact that the level of customer awareness of the KFC brand as a fast food brand, particularly fried chicken, contributes to increasing customer trust in the KFC brand. This trust is built upon the customers' belief that KFC has the ability to process its menu well and that it adjusts the menu internationally to suit regional tastes. As customer trust in the KFC brand increases, KFC's brand equity also increases, as indicated by its brand image that matches the product quality.

This idea is in line with the research proposed by Dib and Alhaddad (2014), which claims that one type of brand awareness is a recognized brand that has the potential to be trusted and that its quality can be accounted for as a type of brand trust. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), building customer-based brand equity depends, in large part, on brand recognition. Higher brand awareness will have an impact on the growth of brand equity because it increases the likelihood that a brand will be chosen during the purchasing decision-making process, which eventually results in higher sales, lower costs, and greater profits for the business (Killa, 2008). In a conceptual model, the results of this study corroborate studies conducted by Kusumajaya and Semuel (2014); Dib and Alhaddad (2014); El Naggar and Bendary (2017) that brand awareness influences brand trust. Additionally, Ahmed et al. (2014); Liao (2015) concluded that brand trust has an effect on brand equity.

### *6.10. The Influence of Brand Associations on Brand Equity through Brand Trust*

Brand equity can be influenced by brand associations, but brand confidence can mediate this effect. These findings can be explained by the degree of customer association with the KFC brand, which is indicated by KFC as a fast food brand that suits the lifestyle of urban communities, and by the fact that KFC adapts its menu internationally to suit regional tastes and appeal to the lifestyle of urban communities. As a result, consumer confidence in the KFC brand increases, leading to a brand image that is consistent with the quality of its products and subsequent growth in KFC's brand equity.

This idea is in line with the research presented by French and Smith (2013), who found that brand associations are strong and become stronger as consumers become more familiar with the brand through consumption, which in turn increases consumer confidence in the brand. According to Sasmita and Suki (2015), brand association is connected to the thoughts that consumers have, both positive and negative, about a brand. The stronger the brand association, the more strongly consumers will recall the brand and its strength. A conceptual representation includes the findings of this study, which support those of Muhadjir and Rahmawati (2009); El Naggar and Bendary (2017), Ahmed et al. (2014), and Liao (2015), who found that brand

associations have a significant impact on consumer trust in brands and that brand equity is influenced by brand trust.

#### *6.11. Effect of Brand Awareness on Brand Equity through Brand Loyalty*

The results can be explained by the fact that KFC is the fried chicken fast food brand that first comes to customers' minds, which contributes to customer loyalty to the KFC brand, which is indicated by the fact that customers still choose KFC over other fast food options, despite KFC having a higher price. Brand loyalty has the ability to mediate the effect of brand awareness on brand equity. KFC's brand equity is growing as a result of rising customer loyalty to the company and having a brand image that is consistent with the quality of its products.

This concept is in accordance with the study put forward by [Lu et al. \(2015\)](#), which suggests that the level of consumer awareness of the brand can create consumer loyalty to the brand. This condition arises because high brand awareness tends to be chosen by consumers when making purchases, which subsequently leads to repeat purchases, thus building brand loyalty. According to [Marshall \(2010\)](#), brand loyalty is a concept in which companies emphasize building or maintaining long-term customer visits in order to increase brand loyalty, thus brand loyalty becomes the heart of brand equity formation. In a conceptual model, the results of this study support the findings of the study conducted by [Bravo Gil et al. \(2007\)](#); [Dhurup et al. \(2014\)](#), and [Akhtar et al. \(2016\)](#), which suggests that brand awareness affects brand loyalty, as well as the results of the study conducted by [Ahmed et al. \(2014\)](#) and [Liao \(2015\)](#), which indicate that brand trust has an effect on brand equity

#### *6.12. The Influence of Brand Associations on Brand Equity through Brand Loyalty*

Brand loyalty is able to mediate the effect of brand association on brand equity. This result can be explained that the level of customer association with the KFC brand, which is highlighted by KFC as a fast food brand that suits the lifestyle of urban communities, contributing to customer loyalty toward the KFC brand. Despite having a higher price, consumers still choose KFC over other fast food chains. The higher customer loyalty towards the KFC brand, the greater the increase in KFC's brand equity, which is demonstrated by KFC having a brand image that matches with its product quality.

This idea is consistent with the research presented by [Hossien et al. \(2012\)](#) that suggests brand associations can foster consumer loyalty to companies. Brand association refers to the memories linked to the brand that consumers have in their minds, whether they are positive or negative. According to [Marshall \(2010\)](#), brand loyalty is a concept that businesses emphasize in order to boost brand loyalty by either creating or maintaining long-term customer visits. As a result, brand loyalty becomes the core of brand equity formation. The findings of this research, which show how brand associations affect brand loyalty, support those of studies by [Bravo Gil et al. \(2007\)](#) and [Alexandris et al. \(2008\)](#).

## **7. Research Implications**

The implications of the research findings include two things, namely theoretical and practical implications.

### *7.1. Theoretical Implications*

The results of this study have implications for the development of consumer brand relationship theory, indicating that KFC brand equity can be formed through a strong relationship between brand sellers and buyers. These results are in accordance with the perspective proposed by [Schultz and Schultz \(2003\)](#) that a consumer brand relationship is a bond in the form of financial, physical, and emotional that keeps sellers and buyers together. [Bouhleb et al. \(2011\)](#) stated that the consumer brand relationship is an interaction between a brand and brand consumers that can produce a strong and permanent relationship, resulting in a strong brand name. Additionally, [Veloutsou \(2007\)](#) revealed that companies use the brands of their products to encourage and develop a bond with consumers.

The application of the consumer brand relationship theory in this study can be explained by the emotional bond between KFC brands and KFC customers, which is able to generate strong brand equity. The knowledge and brand associations made by customers also contribute to the strength of KFC's brand equity. This idea is consistent with the perception that brand recognition is crucial in building customer-based brand equity, according to [Kotler and Keller \(2012\)](#). Higher brand awareness will have an impact on the growth of brand equity because it increases the likelihood that a brand will be chosen during the purchasing decision-making process, which eventually results in higher sales, lower costs, and greater profits for the business ([Killa, 2008](#)). Brand association is related to consumer perceptions of a brand, both positive and negative, according to [Sasmita & Suki, \(2015\)](#) and [Musekiwa et al. \(2013\)](#). The more strongly a brand is associated with a product, the more strength it will have, and the more important brand association will be in developing strong brand equity.

Brand awareness and associations contribute to increasing brand equity through brand trust and loyalty. The implementation of consumer brand relationship theory in this study can be explained by the strong and

permanent relationship formed due to the interaction between a brand and its customers shown through brand trust and loyalty. Bouhlel et al. (2011) revealed that customers become very close to brands that are able to build strong emotional relationships with them (Bouhlel et al., 2011). A positive brand image and the ability to interact personally are central to the formation of a successful brand relationship (O'Loughlin, Szmigin, & Turnbull, 2004).

The study's findings have ramifications for Aaker's (1997) brand equity theory, which states that brand equity can be formed by factors such as brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Aaker's theory is supported by previous research conducted by Ahmed et al. (2014) and Liao (2015), which indicates that brand equity can be created by customer trust in brands and the ability to mediate the impact of brand awareness and brand associations on brand equity.

### **7.2. Practical Implications**

The practical implications of this study are as follows:

1. Brand awareness plays a role in helping customers decide how to get the highest benefits or expected uses of the brand. Considering KFC as a dominant brand in forming brand awareness variables, this means that the more often customers consume KFC as a fast food brand and have a high level of interest in KFC products, the more likely they are to remember the name KFC as a fast food brand. Practically, KFC management in East Java needs to use content marketing so that customers always remember the name KFC as a fast food brand.
2. Brand associations refer to all things or impressions related to a brand that are stored in the memory of customers. Impressions related to the brand will increase with the increasing number of customer experiences in consuming a particular brand and the ease of obtaining information about the brand. To enhance brand association, KFC management in East Java needs to sponsor various activities that make the brand the same image as the activity. Besides that, KFC can become an endorser, so that the image of the endorser can be attached to the brand and consumer perceptions will be reflected in the integrity and identity of the endorser.
3. Brand trust is a sense of security that a customer has through interaction with a brand, which is based on the customer's perception that the brand is trustworthy and responsible. KFC management in East Java needs to maintain brand reliability and a good reputation for the brand.
4. Brand loyalty refers to how positively customers feel about a brand, how committed they are to it, and how likely they are to purchase that brand in the future. It is essential that KFC management in East Java innovate and improve products by introducing new variants.
5. Brand equity is the most important part of a business because it is an asset that can provide its own value in the eyes of its customers. KFC management in East Java needs to create a positive customer perspective, and build deep bonds with customers.

### **8. Conclusion**

Brand equity, brand confidence, and brand loyalty are significantly influenced by brand awareness and brand associations. Brand equity is significantly influenced by brand loyalty and confidence. Brand equity is indirectly impacted by brand awareness and brand associations, which are partially mediated by brand trust. Brand loyalty partially mediates the indirect impact of brand awareness and associations on brand equity. For KFC management in East Java, it is necessary to increase the popularity of the KFC brand through content marketing and sponsor various activities while becoming an endorser so that customers always remember the name KFC as a fast food brand through the KFC logo. KFC outlets in East Java should consistently maintain the quality of the products offered and maintain good relationships with customers. This will lead to equal benefits obtained to the costs incurred and customers being willing to recommend KFC to others, resulting in pride among KFC's fast food customers. These findings can be used as reference material for further research in the same field and for developing this research by examining other factors that can increase brand equity, such as Country of Origin Perception (the country where a product is produced) and customer satisfaction.

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