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Social Media Marketing Activities and Chinese Automobile Brand Equity in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The research addresses the limited empirical evidence integrating social media marketing activities, brand experience, brand trust, perceived localization, and country-of-origin to explain brand equity in the context of Chinese automobile brands in Indonesia. The research examines the relationships among these constructs and considers brand experience and brand trust as consumer responses within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, while incorporating perceived localization as a moderating factor and country-of-origin as an antecedent of brand trust. Data are collected from 396 valid respondents in Indonesia and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that social media marketing activities positively affect brand experience ($\beta = 0.157$, $p = 0.002$) and brand trust ($\beta = 0.242$, $p < 0.001$). Meanwhile, brand experience ($\beta = 0.203$, $p = 0.001$) and brand trust ($\beta = 0.147$, $p = 0.010$) positively affect brand equity. Perceived localization positively moderates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand experience ($\beta = 0.227$, $p = 0.001$). Then, country-of-origin positively affects brand trust ($\beta = 0.168$, $p = 0.002$). The indirect effects show mixed results. The indirect effects of social media marketing activities through brand experience and brand trust are not statistically significant. The indirect effects of social media marketing activities × perceived localization and perceived localization on brand equity through brand experience are significant. The research contributes to S-O-R research by integrating digital marketing stimuli, consumer psychological responses, and foreign-brand contextual factors within a single model.

Keywords: social media marketing activities, perceived localization, country-of-origin, Chinese Automobile brands

INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has arrived earlier than most industries anticipated (Laradi et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021). As a result, organizations are reconsidering how to engage and retain consumers over the long term. One of the strategies is through social media. Social media is more than just a means of communication (Putra et al., 2025). Currently, it is used by companies as a major marketing channel to spread information about their products and services, communicate directly with customers, and maintain consistency through a continuous relationship (Hafez, 2022; Witek-Hajduk & Zaborek, 2022). According to the 2024 Digital Report: Global Overview (Kemp, 2024), there are more than five billion social media users worldwide, representing about half of the global population, and users spend more than two hours per day on social media. The development of digital technology has also changed consumer behavior. Today, consumers research products online, compare options, read reviews, and interact with brands on social media before they purchase. Price and product quality are no longer enough to win the competition (Gaber & Elsamadicy, 2021; Amin & Lim, 2021).

Indonesia is experiencing rapid growth in digital technology and social media usage, with approximately 139 million active social media users (Kemp, 2024). Social media has become one of the first sources consumers use before making purchase decisions,

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particularly to assess product quality, compare brands, and obtain recommendations from other users (Putra et al., 2025). This development requires companies to strengthen their digital marketing strategies and improve their market position since a strong brand on social media can provide a competitive advantage (Huang et al., 2022; Malarvizhi et al., 2022).

This development is also evident in the Indonesian automotive industry. Competition has intensified as Chinese manufacturers, such as Wuling, Chery, BYD, DFSK, Geely, Great Wall Motor, and Jaecoo, enter and expand in the market. These brands compete through pricing, technological innovation, and an increased range of products (Lee, 2021). However, to win a lasting competitive advantage, companies need more than low prices or high technology (Kesumahati et al., 2026). Because buying a car involves a substantial financial commitment, consumers tend to spend more time gathering information, comparing alternatives, and evaluating brands before deciding (Ariyanto et al., 2025). This is where brand equity plays an important strategic role. Brand equity is consumers' perception of how they choose and trust a brand, and this perception helps companies to differentiate themselves in crowded markets (Gutiérrez et al., 2024).

The Indonesian Chinese automobile context is theoretically relevant because consumers evaluate foreign brands not only through product attributes but also through digital interactions, country-of-origin perceptions, and perceived local relevance. Social media interactions can shape consumer responses, while country-of-origin and local adaptation may influence evaluations of foreign brands (Blanco-Encomienda & Rosillo-Díaz, 2025; Ebrahim, 2020; Kim et al., 2024; Koay et al., 2021; Rambocas & Narsingh, 2022; Safeer et al., 2022). Therefore, this context provides an appropriate setting to examine how digital marketing, foreign-brand perceptions, and local relevance relate to brand equity.

Brand equity is increasingly a priority in companies' strategic agendas, and companies increasingly rely on social media marketing activities to shape how consumers perceive their brands (Yuwono et al., 2025). Social media enables companies to communicate directly with consumers, share information as it develops, handle complaints, and bring consumers closer to the purchasing process (Koay et al., 2021). Beyond promotion, social media can also help companies to build long-term relationships with their customers (Ebrahim, 2020). Well-managed social media marketing influences consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses and strengthens engagement, thereby contributing to brand value (Han et al., 2023; Haudi et al., 2022; Zarei et al., 2022).

The relationships are explained through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory. The S-O-R theory explains how external stimuli influence an individual's internal psychological state and how the psychological state subsequently relates to behavioral or evaluative responses (Ariyanto et al., 2025). Signals sent by organizations can serve as external stimuli that shape consumers' cognitive and emotional evaluations (Koay et al., 2023). Consumers do not necessarily respond to marketing stimuli directly because their responses involve internal psychological processes shaped by previous experiences and interactions with a brand (Aslam & Luna, 2021). In this research, social media marketing activities serve as the stimulus, brand experience and brand trust represent distinct internal consumer responses, and brand equity is the resulting consumer-based outcome. Brand experience reflects consumers' experiences arising from interactions with a brand, whereas brand trust reflects consumers' confidence in the brand's reliability and ability to deliver its promised value (Husain et al., 2022). Thus, these constructs are treated as parallel psychological responses rather than sequential stages (Bagozzi et al., 2021). Perceived localization and country-of-origin are incorporated as contextual factors that may influence how consumers evaluate foreign brands (Rambocas & Narsingh, 2022). Accordingly, the S-O-R framework provides the theoretical basis for examining how digital marketing activities and foreign-brand perceptions are associated with brand equity.

Positive online interactions, including images, testimonials, and ongoing communication, shape consumers' feelings, thoughts, and reactions to a brand. Over time, these interactions enhance brand experience and strengthen consumers' perceptions of brand value (Chen & Qasim, 2021; Dananjoyo & Udin, 2025). Brand trust is equally important in the automobile industry because consumers want brands to deliver their promises with consistent communication and positive experiences (Hoque, 2024). Brand trust develops through repeated interactions and accumulated consumer experiences and can influence consumers' overall evaluations of a brand. Therefore, brand experience and brand trust represent two distinct psychological responses through which consumers may develop favorable evaluations of a brand (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

Foreign car manufacturers are not the only factor influencing consumers' opinions of them. Chinese automakers in Indonesia compete not only through innovation of products but also through adaptation to local market conditions and influencing consumers' perception of the country-of-origin of the brand (Oduro et al., 2024). Marketing practices aligned with local culture and consumer preferences can increase emotional closeness and positive responses to foreign brands (Rambocas & Narsingh, 2022; Safeer et al., 2022). At the same time, consumers' perceptions of country-of-origin influence perceptions of product quality, technological capability, and brand credibility. Local market adaptations impact consumer reactions to foreign brands (Lee, 2021). Country-of-origin perceptions remain a significant factor in consumers' evaluation of international brands (Zhang et al., 2022). Country-of-origin also influences consumers' brand evaluations, purchase intentions, and trust

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(Blanco-Encomienda et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024). This suggests that perceived localization and country-of-origin can help explain Indonesian consumers' evaluations of Chinese automobile brands (Gutiérrez et al., 2024).

Extensive research has been conducted on social media marketing activities and brand-related outcomes (Hafez, 2022; Han et al., 2023). However, much of this work is in banking, retail, hospitality, or fashion. The automobile industry is much less in the spotlight, and consumer decision-making does not fit neatly into those other sectors (Witek-Hajduk & Zaborek, 2022). Buying a car is usually a bigger financial commitment, a longer decision-making process, and a greater perceived risk, meaning consumers will evaluate more factors before they trust a brand. Previous studies have linked social media marketing to brand experience and brand trust (Ebrahim, 2020; Haudi et al., 2022; Koay et al., 2021; Maulasena et al., 2024) and connected these variables to brand equity and other favorable brand outcomes (Hafez, 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2021; Tran & Nguyen, 2022; Zollo et al., 2020). However, some studies emphasize the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand trust, while others examine brand experience as a pathway toward stronger brand equity (Cuong, 2020; Husain et al., 2022; Tran & Nguyen, 2022). Consequently, limited evidence is available on how brand experience and brand trust can be considered together as distinct consumer responses in explaining brand equity in the context of Chinese automobile brands in Indonesia. A further gap concerns the integration of foreign-brand contextual factors into this relationship. Perceived localization and country-of-origin have been examined in previous studies, but they are generally considered as separate factors. Perceived Localization refers specifically to consumers' perceptions of how relevant and adapted a foreign brand's communication and marketing activities are to the local market, rather than broader operational localization such as local production, distribution, pricing, or after-sales service (Dong & Yu, 2020; Han et al., 2023; Safeer et al., 2022). Meanwhile, country-of-origin is treated as a consumer perception associated with a brand's national origin rather than as a direct measure of product quality, technological competence, brand image, or corporate credibility (Oduro et al., 2024). Previous research indicates that adaptation to local values and market conditions can influence consumers' responses toward foreign brands (Lim & Kesumahati, 2022), as well as country-of-origin perceptions. Similarly, country-of-origin perceptions can influence consumers' evaluations and trust toward foreign brands (Blanco-Encomienda et al., 2024). Nevertheless, limited empirical evidence has examined these contextual factors together with social media marketing activities, brand experience, brand trust, and brand equity within the Chinese automobile context in Indonesia.

This gap also presents a theoretical opportunity to extend the S-O-R framework to foreign automobile brands. Rather than treating social media marketing activities as having a direct relationship with brand equity alone, the researchers consider the psychological responses that may arise from consumers' interactions with social media marketing. Brand experience and brand trust are incorporated as two distinct internal responses because they capture different dimensions of consumers' evaluations. Perceived localization is incorporated as a moderating factor because the perceived local relevance of a foreign brand may influence the strength of the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand experience. Meanwhile, country-of-origin is positioned as an antecedent of brand trust because perceptions associated with a brand's country-of-origin may serve as an informational cue when consumers evaluate a foreign brand. This positioning allows the study to integrate digital marketing activities, consumer psychological responses, and foreign-brand contextual perceptions within a single S-O-R-based model.

To address the research gap, the researchers examine the relationships among social media marketing activities, brand experience, brand trust, brand equity, perceived localization, and country-of-origin. More and more consumers use social media to find product information and evaluate automobile brands before buying. Companies can build stronger relationships and create meaningful interactions with consumers through interactive communication, personalized content, and continuous digital engagement. These interactions can shape consumers' cognitive and emotional evaluations and lead to more favorable brand experiences. According to Koay et al. (2021), interactive and personalized social media marketing efforts enhance brand experience. Similar findings are reported by Chen and Qasim (2021) and Dananjoyo and Udin (2025) that positive digital interactions increase consumers' brand experience and perception of brand value. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social media marketing activities have a significant positive effect on brand experience.

Social media marketing can also build consumer trust through open communication, quick responses, and consistent interaction. This is particularly relevant in the automobile industry because purchasing a car involves substantial financial commitment and perceived risk. Ebrahim (2020) has found that social media marketing activities directly lead to higher consumer trust. Similarly, Haudi et al. (2022) and Maulasena et al. (2024) have found that effective social media marketing increases brand trust. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social media marketing activities have a significant positive effect on brand trust.

Brand experience refers to consumers' responses arising from their direct and indirect interactions with

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a brand. Positive brand experience can build stronger emotional bonds, improve consumer evaluations, and increase a brand's perceived value. Consumers who repeatedly experience positive interactions with a brand are more likely to develop favorable brand perceptions. Hafez (2022) has found that brand experience plays an important role in the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand equity. Similar findings are reported by Zollo et al. (2020), Tran and Nguyen (2022), and Sohaib et al. (2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Brand experience has a significant positive effect on brand equity.

Brand trust reflects consumers' expectations regarding a brand's ability to deliver its promised value consistently. Higher levels of trust can reduce perceived risk and encourage consumers to develop stronger brand preferences. Therefore, brands that earn consumer trust tend to develop stronger brand equity because they are perceived as reliable and credible. Previous studies have shown that brand trust is associated with positive consumer outcomes and brand-related evaluations (Ebrahim, 2020; Haudi et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand trust has a significant positive effect on brand equity.

Consumers generally evaluate foreign brands based on how well they adapt their products and marketing activities to local market conditions. A brand perceived as sensitive to local culture and consumer preferences may generate more favorable consumer responses. This local relevance may strengthen the effect of social media marketing activities on brand experience because consumers may perceive the resulting content and interactions as more meaningful and relevant to their context (Lim & Kesumahati, 2022). Similarly, adapting marketing activities to local values can enhance consumers' emotional attachment, trust, and responses toward foreign brands (Safeer et al., 2022; Rambocas & Narsingh, 2022). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Perceived localization positively moderates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand experience.

Consumers may also associate a brand's country-of-origin with product quality, technological capability, and organizational credibility. This perception is particularly relevant for foreign automobile brands because consumers may use country-of-origin information when evaluating a brand. Blanco-Encomienda and Rosillo-Díaz (2025) have argued that country-of-origin perceptions influence consumers' brand evaluations and purchase decisions. Similarly, Kim et al. (2024) have found that positive product country-of-origin perceptions lead to increased consumer trust in a brand. Therefore, country-of-origin is positioned as an antecedent of brand trust in the research. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Country-of-origin has a positive and significant impact on brand trust.

Based on the theoretical foundation and the proposed hypotheses, the research develops a research framework to investigate the relationships among social media marketing activities, brand experience, brand trust, and brand equity. The research further examines perceived localization as a moderating variable in the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand experience, and country-of-origin as an antecedent of brand trust. The proposed research framework is presented in Figure 1.

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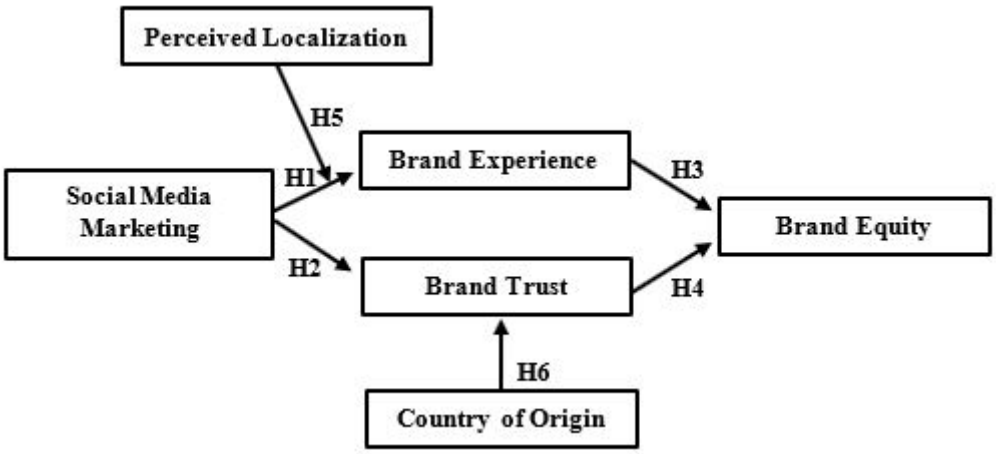


Figure 1 Research Model

METHODS

The research uses a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the relationships among social media marketing activities, brand experience, brand trust, brand equity, perceived localization, and country-of-origin. A quantitative approach is employed because the research examines hypothesized relationships among latent constructs using statistical analysis. The study population comprises Indonesian consumers with experience or knowledge of Chinese automobile brands marketed in Indonesia, including Wuling, Chery, BYD, DFSK, Geely, Great Wall Motor, and Jaecoo.

The research employs non-probability purposive sampling based on predetermined eligibility criteria. Respondents are required to have experience or knowledge of Chinese automobile brands marketed in Indonesia and to follow or engage with social media content from Chinese automobile brands. These criteria are established before data collection and used during screening to determine respondent eligibility. A total of 437 responses are collected. During data screening, 41 responses are excluded because the respondents do not meet the predetermined social media engagement criterion. The screening is conducted based on the responses recorded in Google Forms and subsequently checked using the downloaded response data. After screening, 396 valid responses are retained for the final analysis.

Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire using Google Forms from November 25, 2025, to February 26, 2026. The questionnaire was distributed through social media and messaging platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, to reach Indonesian consumers who met the predetermined eligibility criteria. The questionnaire consists of screening questions, respondents' characteristics, and measurement items representing the six research constructs. All questionnaire items are required to be completed, so no missing responses are present in the retained dataset.

Before completing the questionnaire, respondents are informed that the collected data are used for academic research and publication purposes. Participation is voluntary, and respondents are informed that personal information, including names and email addresses, is disclosed or publicly disseminated. Respondents are asked to respond based on their experiences and opinions.

The questionnaire measures six constructs: social media marketing activities, brand experience, country-of-origin, brand trust, brand equity, and perceived localization. The measurement items are based on established measurement dimensions for each construct and adapted to the research context of Chinese automobile brands in Indonesia. The items are translated into Indonesian and reviewed to ensure that the wording is understandable and relevant to the target respondents and research context. The questionnaire consists of 30 measurement items, with five items for each construct. All items are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Before the main data collection, the measurement items are reviewed for conceptual and contextual relevance. No pilot testing is conducted before the main data collection.

The research examines six constructs: social media marketing activities as the independent variable; brand experience and brand trust as consumer psychological responses; brand equity as the dependent variable; perceived localization as a moderator; and country-of-origin as an antecedent of brand trust. The sample size is determined using the 10-times approach recommended for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), based on the number of measurement indicators in the model (Hair et al., 2021). With 30 measurement indicators, the minimum required sample is 300 respondents. The final sample of 396 valid responses therefore exceeds the minimum sample requirement.

Data are analyzed using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS. PLS-SEM is selected because the research model involves multiple relationships among latent constructs, including direct, moderating, and indirect effects. The analysis is conducted in two stages: the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The measurement model is assessed using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. Discriminant validity is assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

The structural model is assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and path coefficients. Hypothesis testing is conducted using bootstrapping, with path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and 95% confidence intervals used to assess the significance and precision of the estimated relationships. The moderation hypothesis is evaluated through the interaction term between social media marketing activities and perceived localization and its effect on brand experience.

In addition to the hypothesized direct relationships, indirect effects are assessed based on the structural paths specified in the research model. The analysis examines the indirect relationships of social media marketing activities and country-of-origin through brand trust, social media marketing activities and perceived localization through brand experience, and the indirect effect of the social media marketing activities and perceived localization interaction through brand experience on brand equity. These indirect effects are evaluated using bootstrapping results, including path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and 95% confidence intervals. The indirect-effect analysis is conducted to assess the proposed explanatory pathways without introducing separate formal mediation hypotheses.

Last, model assessment also considers the

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Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) as a model-fit diagnostic. Goodness of Fit (GoF) is not used as the primary criterion for evaluating model quality. Then, greater emphasis is placed on explanatory power (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and the significance and confidence intervals of the estimated relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 437 responses are obtained from the questionnaire survey. During screening process, 41 responses are excluded because the respondents do not meet the predetermined eligibility criteria. Therefore, 396 valid responses are retained for the final analysis. Table 1 (see Appendices) presents the demographic characteristics of the 396 respondents in the final analytical sample. Among the valid respondents, men account for 59.8% of the sample, while women account for 40.2%. The largest age group is over 36 years (38.6%), followed by those aged 27–31 years (22.0%) and 32–36 years (14.9%). Entrepreneurs represent the largest occupational group (34.1%), followed by private-sector employees (31.8%) and government employees (18.9%). The most common monthly income range is IDR 5,000,000–10,000,000 (27.0%). Among the automobile brands reported by respondents, Wuling has the highest frequency (29.8%), followed by BYD and Chery (16.7% each).

Reliability, convergent validity, internal consistency, and discriminant validity are the basics for evaluating a measurement model. All criteria follow Hair et al. (2021). Table 2 (see Appendices) shows that all indicator loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.739 to 1.000. The results indicate that the reliability of the indicators is satisfactory. Furthermore, the AVE values ranged from 0.584 to 1.000, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values also surpass the minimum acceptable value of 0.70, confirming that all constructs demonstrate adequate internal consistency and convergent validity.

Discriminant validity is assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT. As shown in Tables 3 (see Appendices) and 4 (see Appendices), the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs. Each indicator loads highest on its respective construct. Then, all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.9. These findings confirm that all constructs are empirically distinct and suitable for subsequent structural model analysis.

The structural model is assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and SRMR. The results are shown in Table 5 (see Appendices). The R^2 values are 0.085 for brand equity, 0.109 for brand trust, and 0.121 for brand experience, indicating that the model explained 8.5%, 10.9%, and 12.1% of the variance in the respective endogenous constructs. These values indicate relatively low explanatory power, suggesting that other factors not included in the model may also contribute to brand equity, brand trust, and brand experience. The Q^2 values are 0.053 for brand equity, 0.050 for brand trust, and 0.077 for brand experience, indicating positive predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. The f^2 values for the structural relationships range from 0.022 to 0.064, indicating relatively small effect sizes. The SRMR values are 0.049 for the saturated model and 0.064 for the estimated model, both indicating acceptable model fit. Overall, the structural model demonstrates predictive relevance, although its explanatory power remains limited.

The structural model results are presented in Table 6 (see Appendices). All hypothesized direct relationships are statistically significant at the 5% significance level. Social media marketing activities positively affect brand experience ($\beta = 0.157$, $t = 3.048$, $p = 0.002$) and brand trust ($\beta = 0.242$, $t = 3.921$, $p < 0.001$). Brand experience ($\beta = 0.203$, $t = 3.318$, $p = 0.001$) and brand trust ($\beta = 0.147$, $t = 2.577$, $p = 0.010$) also positively affect brand equity. Country-of-origin positively affects brand trust ($\beta = 0.168$, $t = 3.140$, $p = 0.002$), while perceived localization positively affects brand experience ($\beta = 0.185$, $t = 3.183$, $p = 0.002$). In addition, the interaction between social media marketing activities and perceived localization has a positive and significant effect on brand experience ($\beta = 0.227$, $t = 3.387$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that perceived localization strengthens the positive relationship between social media marketing activities and brand experience. All corresponding 95% bootstrap confidence intervals exclude zero.

For hypothesis testing, statistical significance is evaluated at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$). The 95% bootstrap confidence interval is also considered, with an indirect effect interpreted as statistically significant when the interval does not include zero. The indirect effects are presented in Table 7 (see Appendices). The indirect effect of social media marketing activities on brand equity through brand trust is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.036$, $t = 1.990$, $p = 0.047$), with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of 0.009–0.079. The indirect effect of perceived localization on brand equity through brand experience is also significant ($\beta = 0.037$, $t = 2.366$, $p = 0.018$), like the indirect effect of the social media marketing activities × perceived localization interaction through brand experience ($\beta = 0.046$, $t = 2.020$, $p = 0.044$). In contrast, the indirect effect of country-of-origin on brand equity through brand trust is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.025$, $t = 1.773$, $p = 0.076$). The indirect effect of social media marketing activities on brand equity through brand experience is also not significant ($\beta = 0.032$, $t = 1.859$, $p = 0.063$). These results indicate that significant direct relationships between individual constructs do not necessarily result in significant indirect effects through every proposed pathway.

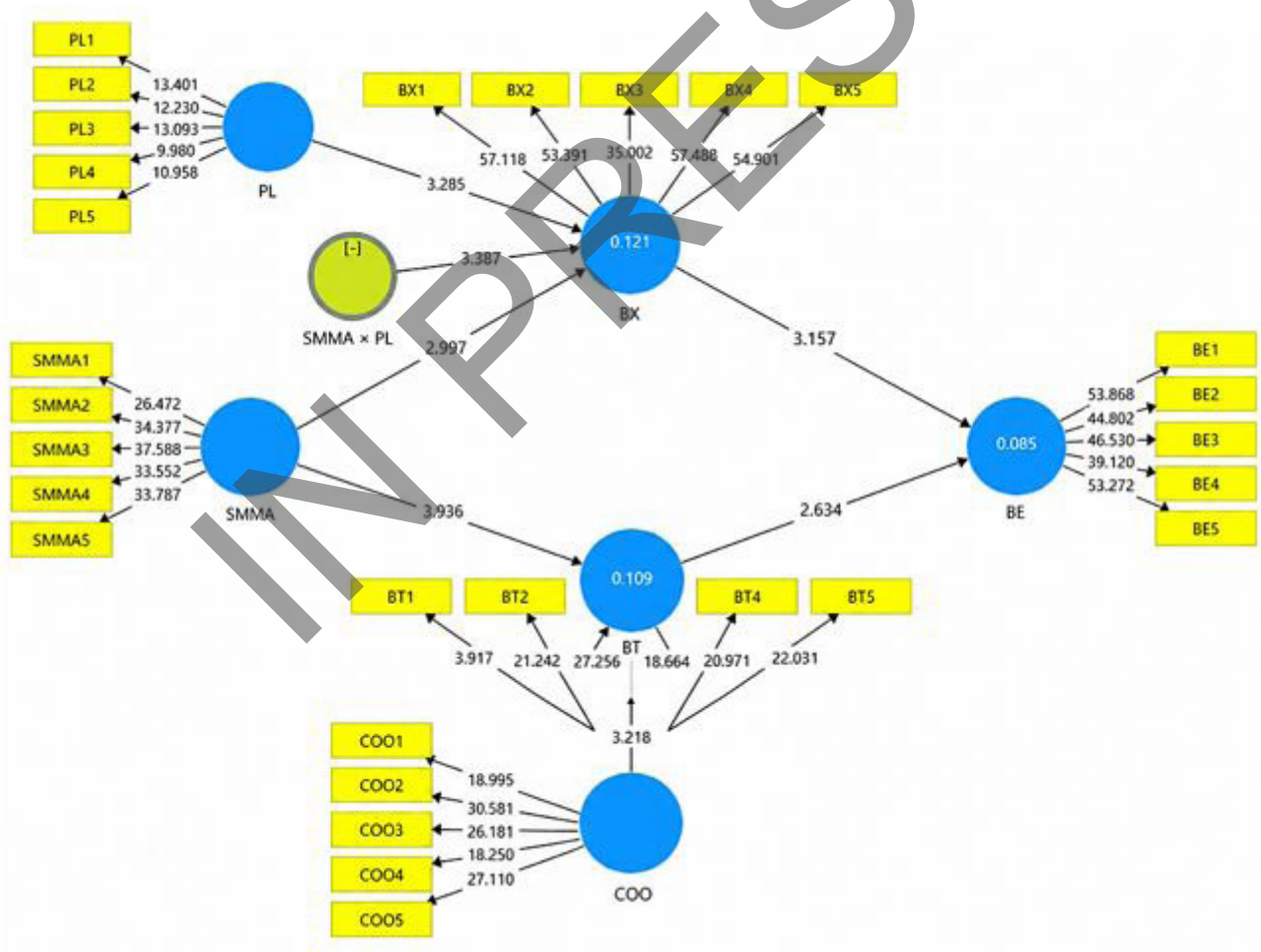
Figure 2 provides an overall representation of the relationships among social media marketing activities, brand experience, brand trust, brand equity,

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perceived localization, and country-of-origin in the proposed research model. The values on the structural paths represent t-statistics from the bootstrapping analysis, while the values on the indicator paths represent the corresponding bootstrapping statistics for the measurement indicators. The values shown inside the endogenous constructs represent the coefficient of determination (R^2) for brand experience, brand trust, and brand equity. These results visually represent the estimated structural and measurement relationships and support the evaluation of the hypothesized relationships in the structural model.

The findings indicate that social media marketing activities significantly and positively influence brand experience ($\beta = 0.157$, $t = 3.048$, $p = 0.002$), supporting H1. This result suggests that social media activities give consumers opportunities to interact with brand-related information, visual content, and digital communication, which can shape their brand experience. This relationship is particularly relevant for Chinese automobile brands because consumers may rely on digital interactions to form initial impressions before engaging with the product directly. The relatively small effect size ($f^2 = 0.027$) and the low R^2 for brand experience (0.121) nevertheless indicate that social media marketing is only one of several factors shaping consumers' brand experiences. Thus, the finding supports social media as a stimulus within the S-O-R framework without implying it is the dominant determinant of brand experience. This is consistent with Koay et al. (2021) that social media marketing works best for building consumer experience when it is entertaining, interactive, on-trend, and tailored to the audience. Haudi et al. (2022) have concluded that social media interaction strengthens the brand experience. Additionally, Purwianti et al. (2024) have emphasized the importance of brand-related experiences and perceptions in strengthening brand equity and customer loyalty. To stay competitive in the Indonesian automotive market, organizations need to continue building engaging, consumer-focused social media strategies.

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Note: Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), Brand Experience (BX), Country-of-Origin (COO), Brand Trust (BT), Brand Equity (BE), and Perceived Localization (PL).

Figure 2 Structural Model Results

Social media marketing activities also have a positive and significant effect on brand trust (β = 0.242, t = 3.921, p < 0.001), supporting H2. Among the direct relationships examined, this path has the largest coefficient and effect size (f^2 = 0.064). The result suggests that accurate information, responsive communication, and visible brand engagement on social media can reduce uncertainty and provide consumers with information that supports confidence in the brand. This function may be particularly important for automobile brands because consumers face substantial financial consequences when evaluating a vehicle purchase. However, the R^2 for brand trust is only 0.109, indicating that social media marketing explains a limited proportion of variation in trust and that other factors beyond digital interaction may also shape consumers' confidence in Chinese automobile brands. According to Ebrahim (2020), social media marketing improves brand trust through increasing interaction between organizations and consumers. This is consistent with Haudi et al. (2022). Meanwhile, Maulasena et al. (2024) have found that brands that engage with consumers on social media are more trusted. Social media is not only a promotional tool but also a way to build and maintain consumer trust.

Brand experience has a positive and significant effect on brand equity (β = 0.203, t = 3.318, p = 0.001), supporting H3. The finding indicates that consumers' interactions and experiences with a brand can contribute to stronger brand evaluations. In the automobile context, experiences formed through brand content and other consumer touchpoints may influence perceptions of familiarity, distinctiveness, and value. The effect size is relatively small (f^2 = 0.042), however, indicating that brand experience is one contributing factor rather than a dominant explanation of brand equity. This interpretation is consistent with the relatively low R^2 for brand equity (0.085), suggesting that additional factors not included in the model likely contribute to consumers' overall brand evaluations. From a broader perspective, Kesumahati et al. (2026) have highlighted that organizational capabilities and entrepreneurial orientation can contribute to improved firm performance, suggesting that firms' capabilities in developing and leveraging strategic resources are important for achieving better outcomes. These results are consistent with the findings of Hafez (2022) that positive brand experiences play an important role in building brand equity by improving consumers' perceptions and emotional attachment to the brand. Similar findings are also reported by Tran and Nguyen (2022). Thus, positive and memorable experiences tend to maintain brand value in the long term (Zollo et al., 2020).

Positive consumer perceptions of a brand can strengthen brand loyalty and foster stronger consumer preference toward the brand (Lady et al., 2024). The results show that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on brand equity (β = 0.147, t = 2.577, p = 0.010), supporting H4. The finding indicates that consumers who perceive Chinese automobile brands as reliable and credible may develop more favorable evaluations of the brands. Trust may be particularly relevant in automobile purchases because the decision involves substantial financial commitment, perceived risk, and expectations regarding product performance and reliability. However, the relatively small effect size (f^2 = 0.022) suggests that brand trust contributes to brand equity but is not a dominant determinant. This result reinforces the need to distinguish statistical significance from substantive importance when interpreting the model. This result supports Ebrahim (2020), who has considered brand trust as an important aspect of brand value, as consumers are likely to buy brands with consistent performance and quality. Haudi et al. (2022) have found that consumers are more likely to choose trusted brands, while Ibrahim et al. (2021) have proven that trust reduces perceived risk and increases confidence in making decisions. The development of trust also increases the value of automotive brands in the Indonesian market.

Perceived localization has a positive and significant direct effect on brand experience (β = 0.185, t = 3.183, p = 0.002). It also positively moderates the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand experience (β = 0.227, t = 3.499, p = 0.001), supporting H5. The direct relationship indicates that perceived local relevance may contribute to brand experience independently of social media marketing. In contrast, the significant interaction indicates that local relevance also changes the strength of the relationship between social media marketing and brand experience. In other words, consumers may respond more favorably to social media activities when the content and communication are perceived as relevant to Indonesian market conditions. The moderation effect has a small effect size (f^2 = 0.047), suggesting that perceived localization strengthens the relationship without being a dominant determinant. This distinction matters because perceived localization in this research refers to consumers' perceptions of local relevance and adaptation, rather than broader operational localization such as local production, distribution, pricing, or after-sales service. This corroborates the findings of Safeer et al. (2022) that communication tailored to local contexts creates stronger emotional bonds and Rambocas and Narsingh (2022) that international brands are rated more favorably when their marketing reflects local cultural norms. For Chinese car brands, the message is pragmatic. Local knowledge must be embedded in the content itself, not tacked on, to affect the Indonesian consumer's experience of the brand.

Country-of-origin has a positive and significant effect on brand Trust (β = 0.168, t = 3.140, p = 0.002), supporting H6. The result indicates that perceptions associated with the national origin of a Chinese automobile brand can contribute to consumers' trust. However, the indirect effect of country-of-origin on brand equity through brand trust is not statistically significant (β = 0.025, t = 1.773, p = 0.076). This difference between the significant direct effect and non-significant indirect effect suggests that country-

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of-origin perceptions may contribute to trust without that trust being sufficiently strong to translate into a measurable indirect association with brand equity in this sample. For high-involvement automobile purchases, consumers may require additional information and direct evidence regarding product performance, safety, reliability, and ownership experience before country-of-origin perceptions can influence broader brand evaluations. Therefore, country-of-origin should be understood as one informational cue rather than a sufficient basis for brand equity formation. This result is supported by Blanco-Encomienda and Rosillo-Díaz (2025), who have found that perceptions of country-of-origin influence the assessments of product quality and brand credibility, and by Kim et al. (2024), who have linked positive perceptions of country-of-origin to trust and purchase intentions. That implies a specific lacuna for the Chinese carmakers. The technological credibility and product quality will have to be demonstrated directly to Indonesian consumers rather than assumed to flow from country-of-origin trust alone.

The indirect-effect results also show that social media marketing activities have different outcomes depending on the psychological pathway through which brand equity is considered. The indirect effect through brand trust is significant ($\beta = 0.036$, $p = 0.047$), whereas the indirect effect through brand experience is not significant ($\beta = 0.032$, $p = 0.063$). This difference indicates that significant component paths do not necessarily produce equally strong indirect effects. Although social media marketing activities positively influence both brand experience and brand trust, the magnitude of the resulting indirect associations with brand equity differs across the two pathways. In the context of automobile purchases, consumers may require stronger evidence of reliability and confidence before digital experiences are translated into broader brand evaluations. This finding supports the S-O-R perspective by showing that the same marketing stimulus may operate through distinct psychological responses with different implications for brand equity.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that social media marketing activities positively affect brand experience and brand trust. Brand experience and brand trust, in turn, positively affect brand equity. However, the indirect effects do not show a uniform pattern across the proposed pathways. The indirect effect of social media marketing activities on brand equity through brand trust is statistically significant, whereas the indirect effect through brand experience is not. Country-of-origin positively affects brand trust, but its indirect effect on brand equity through brand trust is not statistically significant. Perceived localization positively affects brand experience and strengthens the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand experience. These findings indicate that the relationships among digital marketing activities, consumer psychological responses, and brand equity cannot be explained through a single consistent indirect mechanism.

The findings provide support for the application of the S-O-R framework by positioning social media marketing activities as a stimulus, brand experience and brand trust as distinct psychological responses, and brand equity as a consumer-based outcome. The results also indicate that contextual factors, particularly perceived localization and country-of-origin, matter for consumer responses to Chinese automobile brands in Indonesia. However, the relatively low R^2 values indicate that the model explains only a limited proportion of the variance in brand experience, brand trust, and brand equity. Therefore, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that the proposed variables provide a comprehensive explanation of brand equity. The non-significant indirect effects further indicate that the proposed explanatory pathways are only partially supported.

From a managerial perspective, Chinese automobile manufacturers should not rely solely on maintaining an active social media presence. Social media activities should be supported by localized and relevant content, transparent communication, responsive consumer interaction, and consistent product quality and ownership experiences. Particular attention should be given to building consumer trust, as the indirect effect of social media marketing activities through brand trust is statistically significant.

The research has several limitations. First, it focuses on Chinese automobile brands in Indonesia. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries and foreign-brand contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design does not allow changes in consumer perceptions and behavior to be examined over time. Third, the use of non-probability purposive sampling limits the representativeness of the sample. Finally, the model includes a limited number of variables and produces relatively low explanatory power, indicating that other factors may contribute to brand equity.

Future research can examine other industries, foreign-brand contexts, or cross-country settings to improve the findings' generalizability. Longitudinal or mixed-method approaches can provide deeper insights into how consumer responses develop over time. Future studies may also incorporate variables such as brand awareness, digital engagement, consumer involvement, product quality, ownership experience, or brand innovation capability to provide a more comprehensive explanation of brand equity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributed to the conceptual framework, E. K., M. V., and L. P.; Guided the data collection process, E. K.; Performed data analysis and interpretation, E. K.; Guided the data analysis and interpretation, E. K.; Wrote the manuscript, E. K. And M. V.; Reviewed, revised and approved the final manuscript, E. K.; Collected the primary survey data from respondents, M. V.; Prepared the research dataset and utilized SPSS and SmartPLS for data analysis, M. V.; Performed statistical analysis using SPSS and SmartPLS and interpreted the result, M. V.; Reviewed and revised the manuscript, M. V.; and Reviewed and approved the final manuscript, L. P.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of the research are available from the corresponding author, Erilia Kesumahati, upon reasonable request. The data are collected through a primary survey involving Indonesian consumers and cannot be made publicly available due to respondent confidentiality and ethical considerations. Access to the data may be granted for academic purposes under appropriate confidentiality safeguards.

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APPENDICES

Table 1 Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (Respondents)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	237	59.8
	Female	159	40.2
Age	17–21 years	53	13.4
	22–26 years	44	11.1
	27–31 years	87	22.0
	32–36 years	59	14.9
	> 36 years	153	38.6
Occupation	Housewife	1	0.3
	Government Employee	75	18.9
	Private-sector Employee	126	31.8
	Working Student	13	3.3
	Student	46	11.6
	Entrepreneur	135	34.1
Monthly Income	Under IDR 5.000.000	68	17.2
	IDR 5.000.000–10.000.000	107	27.0
	IDR 10.000.001–15.000.000	56	14.2
	IDR 15.000.001–20.000.000	94	23.7
	Over IDR 20.000.000	71	17.9
Automobile Brand	BYD	66	16.7
	Chery	66	16.7
	DFSK	39	9.8
	Geely	43	10.9
	GWM	32	8.1
	Jaecoo	30	7.6
	Wuling	118	29.8
	Others	2	0.4

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Table 2 Results of Measurement Model Assessment

Variable	Item	Indicator	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Social Media Marketing Activities	SMMA1	Enjoyable social media access	0.777	0.871	0.906	0.659
	SMMA2	Creative and understandable content	0.814			
	SMMA3	Ease of social media interaction	0.825			
	SMMA4	Latest automotive and technology information	0.821			
	SMMA5	Content relevance to consumer needs	0.821			
Brand Experience	BX1	Attractive visual impression	0.858	0.906	0.930	0.728
	BX2	Attractive appearance, color, and features	0.853			
	BX3	Time spent viewing brand content	0.819			
	BX4	Curiosity about technology and innovation	0.865			
	BX5	Encouragement to take action	0.868			
Country-of-Origin	COO1	Brand purchase worthiness	0.784	0.869	0.904	0.653
	COO2	Positive view of Chinese automobiles	0.843			
	COO3	Automotive innovation and modern technology	0.806			
	COO4	Attractive and modern design	0.799			
	COO5	Good brand reputation	0.806			
Brand Trust	BT1	Products meeting expectations	0.754	0.822	0.875	0.584
	BT2	Product safety	0.796			
	BT3	Low likelihood of disappointment	0.752			
	BT4	Safety and confidence in purchase	0.739			
	BT5	Fulfillment of brand promises	0.778			
Brand Equity	BE1	Brand familiarity	0.878	0.915	0.936	0.746
	BE2	Brand recognition	0.854			
	BE3	Confidence in purchase decision	0.862			
	BE4	Pride in owning or using the brand	0.844			
	BE5	Distinctive brand advantages	0.879			
Perceived Localization	PL1	Perception of being a local brand	0.803	0.851	0.892	0.624
	PL2	Adaptation to Indonesian consumer needs	0.799			
	PL3	Localization of services, content, and promotions	0.815			
	PL4	Chinese cultural image	0.750			
	PL5	Fit with Indonesian values and lifestyle	0.782			

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Table 3 Results of Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	BE	BT	BX	COO	Moderating Effect	PL	SMMA
Brand Equity (BE)	0.863						
Brand Trust (BT)	0.191	0.764					
Brand Experience (BX)	0.234	0.213	0.853				
Country-of-Origin (COO)	0.165	0.190	0.107	0.808			
Moderating Effect	0.152	0.043	0.238	0.088	1.000		
Perceived Localization (PL)	0.026	0.008	0.180	0.130	0.017	0.790	
Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)	0.178	0.258	0.184	0.090	0.181	0.056	0.812

Table 4 Results of Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	BE	BT	BX	COO	Moderating Effect	PL	SMMA
Brand Equity (BE)							
Brand Trust (BT)	0.219						
Brand Experience (BX)	0.255	0.246					
Country-of-Origin (COO)	0.186	0.214	0.129				
Moderating Effect	0.160	0.060	0.250	0.094			
Perceived Localization (PL)	0.098	0.043	0.198	0.151	0.023		
Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)	0.202	0.300	0.202	0.102	0.195	0.068	

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Table 5 Results of Structural Model Assessment

Construct / Index	Value	Result
Brand Equity (R^2)	0.085	Low
Brand Trust (R^2)	0.109	Low
Brand Experience (R^2)	0.121	Low
Brand Equity (Q^2)	0.053	Positive
Brand Trust (Q^2)	0.050	Positive
Brand Experience (Q^2)	0.077	Positive
SRMR – Saturated Model	0.049	Acceptable
SRMR – Estimated Model	0.064	Acceptable
f^2 Range	0.022-0.064	Small

Note: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

Table 6 Results of Hypothesis Testing (Path Coefficients)

Variable	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistics	P-Values	95% Confidence Interval	f^2	Result
BT > BE	0.147	0.156	0.057	2.577	0.010	0.040−0.254	0.022	Significant
BX > BE	0.203	0.201	0.061	3.318	0.001	0.084−0.329	0.042	Significant
COO > BT	0.168	0.180	0.054	3.140	0.002	0.079−0.283	0.031	Significant
PL > BX	0.185	0.193	0.058	3.183	0.002	0.085−0.304	0.038	Significant
SMMA > BT	0.242	0.251	0.062	3.921	0.000	0.127−0.368	0.064	Significant
SMMA > BX	0.157	0.161	0.052	3.048	0.002	0.057−0.261	0.027	Significant
SMMA × PL > BX	0.227	0.221	0.067	3.387	0.001	0.089−0.348	0.047	Significant

Note: Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), Brand Experience (BX), Country-of-Origin (COO), Brand Trust (BT), Brand Equity (BE), and Perceived Localization (PL).

Table 7 Results of Specific Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Variable	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistics	P-Values	95% Confidence Intervals	Result
COO > BT > BE	0.025	0.029	0.014	1.746	0.081	0.006−0.058	Not Significant
SMMA > BT > BE	0.036	0.039	0.018	1.962	0.047	0.009−0.079	Not Significant
SMMA × PL > BX > BE	0.046	0.045	0.022	2.052	0.040	0.008−0.096	Significant
PL > BX > BE	0.037	0.038	0.016	2.419	0.016	0.012−0.071	Significant
SMMA > BX > BE	0.032	0.033	0.017	1.910	0.056	0.005−0.071	Not Significant

Note: Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), Brand Experience (BX), Country-of-Origin (COO), Brand Trust (BT), Brand Equity (BE), and Perceived Localization (PL).

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