

Conceptualizing Digital Brand Equity Through Thematic Synthesis: An Integrated Framework

Rachata Rungtrakulchai*

**Faculty of Business Administration, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand*

*Corresponding Author. E-mail address: rachata@tni.ac.th

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Abstract

Traditional brand equity models, established in an era of one-way communication, are insufficient for measuring brand performance in the digital age where consumers actively co-create brand meaning. This study addresses the conceptual and measurement gap by aiming to develop a robust, multi-dimensional framework for Digital Brand Equity (DBE) that reflects the paradigm shift to a two-way, interactive communication environment. This conceptual study employs a systematic literature review of 47 key academic papers published between 1990 and 2025. A thematic synthesis was conducted to analyze and integrate existing knowledge, identifying core theoretical constructs and evolutionary patterns in brand equity research. The results show a new, synthesized definition of DBE and proposes seven research propositions that correspond to the core dimensions of digital brand equity, including brand salience, perceived quality, associations, customer-brand engagement, online community, authenticity, and value co-creation. This research contributes a holistic and contemporary DBE framework theoretically grounded in the realities of a decentralized digital landscape, providing a crucial foundation for future empirical validation and offering practitioners a more accurate model for assessing and managing brand value in an era of consumer empowerment.

Keywords: Brand, Brand equity, Customer engagement, Online community, Social media

I. INTRODUCTION

The perception of brands has undergone a dramatic transformation since 1990, moving through distinct phases driven by technological and economic shifts. In the pre-digital era (1990s), brand perception was largely firm-controlled and relied heavily on traditional media. This period was characterized by one-way communication, where success was measured by the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and the resulting consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) metrics like awareness, association, perceived quality, and loyalty, as defined by scholars such as Aaker and Keller (Aaker, 1996; Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Brands successfully managed their image by crafting consistent messaging across mass media channels like television and print, relying on consumers to be passive recipients of their narratives. Consumers evaluated brands primarily on the product's functional benefits and the prestige associated with its symbolic image.

The concept of brand equity, rooted in the foundational works of Keller (1993) and Aaker (1996), has long been central to marketing, offering a measure of the added value a brand provides to products and services. However, the advent of the digital transformation era has rendered many traditional metrics insufficient for accurately measuring brand performance. Digital platforms empowered consumers, providing them with the tools to create and share content, effectively giving them a collective voice. As markets transformed into two-way communications, the locus of control over brand meaning began to decentralize. Peer reviews and user-generated content gained significant influence, meaning brand perception was no longer solely dictated by the company but was co-created through public discourse and shared customer experiences. Perception was no longer just about what a

brand said about itself, but about the shared experiences and collective opinions of the community using it.

This indicates that the conceptual model of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) lacks of mechanisms of two-way communication – such as perceived interactivity and experience, community engagement, and the specific processes of co-creation – as intrinsic dimensions of brand value remains underdeveloped. This also leads directly to a measurement gap, as traditional metrics are inherently designed for a one-way communication paradigm which completely measure the brand meaning in offline contexts. For instance, while we can measure sentiment of online reviews, there is a lack of comprehensive, validated scales that systematically operationalize how a brand's responsiveness to UGC, its facilitation of peer-to-peer conversations, or its intentional design for co-creation directly contribute to and define distinct dimensions of its overall digital equity. The existing brand measures, often adapted from offline contexts, struggle to quantify the specific added value derived from a brand's active participation in, and successful navigation of, a truly interactive and decentralized communication landscape. This gap is clearly state fundamentally re-evaluating what build brand value when consumers are no longer passive recipients but active architects of brand meaning.

This disconnects between foundational theory and digital reality creates significant practical implications for marketing managers. Firms are investing substantial resources into digital strategies designed to foster two-way communication, such as online community management and social media engagement. Yet, without a robust conceptual framework and validated measurement tools that account for these co-creative and interactive dynamics, marketers lack reliable methods to assess their digital brand equity performance. This practical measurement

gap means that managers struggle to accurately gauge the long-term ROI of their engagement-focused initiatives, justify digital marketing expenditures, or strategically allocate resources to the activities that most effectively build sustainable brand value in a decentralized, consumer-driven landscape.

Therefore, the research objectives for this study are to conceptually develop a robust, multi-dimensional framework for Digital Brand Equity (DBE) that explicitly integrates the paradigm shift from traditional to digital communication environment. This endeavor will provide both a more accurate theoretical understanding of modern brand value and practical tools for its assessment in the digital age. This revised conceptualization will move beyond merely adapting traditional brand equity to the digital realm and instead embed the transformative effects of two-way communication as fundamental to the definition and structure of DBE. The aim is to create a model that doesn't just measure the effects of two-way communication but measures the brand equity inherent in the brand's effective participation in such communication. This requires identifying dimensions that intrinsically reflect the brand's capacity to facilitate, engage with, and integrate consumer contributions into its core identity. The validation of such a measurement instrument would bridge the practical need for marketers to assess their performance in an interactive landscape with the academic need for models that accurately reflect the complexities of contemporary brand meaning co-creation. This effort is crucial for researchers to accurately study the antecedents and consequences of DBE in a holistic manner and for practitioners to strategically invest in digital initiatives that truly build sustainable brand value in the face of decentralized control and consumer empowerment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Foundational Theories & Models of Brand Equity

The academic formalization of brand equity in the early 1990s (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) represented a monumental shift in marketing thought, moving the concept of a brand from the ambiguous realm of creative art to the strategic domain of measurable financial assets. Before this period, while branding was practiced, its value was often considered intangible and difficult to quantify, making it a secondary consideration in many boardrooms focused on sales figures and market share. The literature of this foundational era sought to rectify this by providing robust conceptual frameworks and empirical tools to understand, build, and manage brand value. The central argument that emerged was that a brand's worth is not inherent in its products or logos but is a perceptual construct that resides entirely in the minds of consumers. This perspective empowered marketers to argue for long-term brand-building investments, armed with theories that linked brand strength directly to customer loyalty and profitability.

The work of David A. Aaker was instrumental in this endeavor. In his book, *Managing Brand Equity* (Aaker, 1991), he defined brand equity as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product. He identified key assets such as brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. This framework was revolutionary because it broke down the monolithic idea of a "brand" into manageable components that could be strategically influenced. Aaker later expanded on this by emphasizing the creation of a cohesive brand identity as the strategic heart of the brand, arguing that strong brands have a rich, multifaceted personality that guides every marketing action (Aaker, 1996).

Building on Aaker's work, Keller introduced what would become the most influential model in the field, he called Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE). Keller's proposition was that the power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about it over time (Keller, 1993). He defined CBBE as the "differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand," meaning a strong brand makes consumers react more favorably to a product than they would to an unbranded version. His brand equity pyramid provided a clear, actionable roadmap for brand building. It begins with establishing brand salience (identity), then building performance and imagery (meaning), fostering positive judgments and feelings (response), and finally achieving brand resonance, a deep psychological bond representing the pinnacle of a loyal customer relationship. These foundational models, including those from European scholars like Kapferer (2008), were developed in a pre-digital world dominated by television, print, and radio. The implicit assumption was that the firm could carefully control the brand narrative through these one-way mass media channels. The era's research culminated in the development of validated measurement scales, most notably by Yoo and Donthu (2001), which allowed researchers to empirically test these theories and link brand equity to marketing mix elements. The summarize of the key definition of brand equity can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1: Foundational concepts of brand equity

Author(s) & Year	Definition of Brand Equity	Research Approach
Keller (1993)	The differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand.	Conceptual

Table 1: Foundational concepts of brand equity (cont.)

Author(s) & Year	Definition of Brand Equity	Research Approach
Aaker (1996)	A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service.	Conceptual
Yoo and Donthu (2001)	The difference in consumer choice between a focal branded product and an unbranded product given the same level of product features.	Empirical (Survey)

The first scholars to include the internet context, like Christodoulides, De Chernatony, Furrer, Shiu, & Abimbola (2006), therefore began their work not by inventing a new concept, but by undertaking the crucial task of adapting this powerful, established, but firm-centric view of brand equity for a new and radically different interactive environment.

B. The Concept of Consumer and Brand Engagement

The second major evolutionary phase of brand equity studies was driven by the disruption of the internet and, more specifically, the explosion of social media. Previous literatures review a fundamental and irreversible transfer of power from firms to consumers. The controlled, top-down branding management of the 1990s was replaced by a chaotic, democratized, and constant conversations from consumers. This subtopic traces the shift from a passive audience to an active network of creators, critics, and collaborators, and explores the deeper psychological constructs like engagement and authenticity that have become the new value of a brand in this environment.

The paradigm shift was famously heralded by a book calls *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, which provocatively declared that "markets are conversations" and that the internet

was enabling consumers to connect with each other and speak with a powerful, collective voice (Levine, Locke, Searls, & Weinberger, 2000). This was no longer a theoretical proposition but a tangible reality. The architecture of the web, and later social media, provided consumers with unprecedented platforms to share opinions, post reviews, and organize themselves, fundamentally altering the dynamics of brand management (Kucuk, 2008; Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013). The rise of social media platforms was systematically analyzed by scholars like Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), who provided a much-needed classification of the new landscape. Researchers quickly established that social media was not just a new channel, but a new hybrid element of the promotion mix that blurred the lines between mass communication and personal influence (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

A critical finding from this era was the potent influence of user-generated content (UGC) on brand equity. Empirical studies demonstrated that UGC was often perceived as more credible and authentic than firm-generated content, giving it a disproportionate impact on brand perceptions and purchase intentions (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). This meant that brand equity was now being visibly co-created in public forums. As this relational dynamic deepened, the academic focus evolved from studying simple interactions to understanding the psychological state of Customer-Brand Engagement (CBE). Groundbreaking work by Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić (2011) and Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) conceptualized CBE as a consumer's voluntary investment of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resources into a brand. This moved the goalposts for marketers from achieving transactions to fostering a deep, participatory relationship. This relational view drew heavily on earlier consumer

research, particularly Fournier's (1998) work on applying human relationship theory to brands. In an environment saturated with information and UGC, consumers naturally sought shortcuts to determine which brands to trust. This led to the ascendancy of perceived brand authenticity as a critical component of brand equity, with scholars developing frameworks and scales to measure this elusive but essential brand attribute (Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015). The empowered consumer of the digital age doesn't just buy a brand; they assess its character, engage in its story, and ultimately decide if it is authentic enough to earn their trust and loyalty.

C. The Digital Brand Environment: Technology & Experience

The third phase focuses on the context in which modern branding takes place in a complex, integrated, and technologically saturated digital ecosystem. Literatures in this phase moves from the "what" (theories) and the "who" (the consumer) to the "how" and "where" of contemporary brand management. It covers the strategic frameworks needed to navigate this environment, the impact of specific technologies on the brand-consumer interface, and the ultimate goal of delivering a seamless and valuable customer experience. The core argument is that in the current era, brand equity is less about crafting a single message and more about orchestrating a multitude of interconnected touchpoints.

To manage this complexity, marketers needed new strategic playbooks. Practical guides like that of Chaffey and Smith (2017) provided structured models for planning and integrating digital marketing activities. A key strategic shift was the reconceptualization of the consumer's path to purchase. The traditional linear marketing funnel was replaced by the non-linear, iterative consumer journey, a

model that better reflects how consumers now discover, evaluate, and interact with brands across a wide array of digital channels before making a decision (Edelman, 2010; Hamilton & Price, 2019). The primary goal of strategy became managing this entire journey, a concept holistically captured in the work on customer experience management by Lemon & Verhoef (2016).

Delivering a superior customer experience in the digital age requires overcoming significant operational hurdles, chief among them being the integration of online and offline channels. The literature on omni-channel retailing addresses this challenge directly, outlining the shift from a siloed multi-channel approach to a truly integrated system where the consumer experiences the brand, not the channel (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman 2015). Achieving this seamlessness requires deep integration between marketing and operations, a significant organizational challenge highlighted by Bijmolt et al. (2021). The digital environment is also characterized by rapid technological evolution. Research has explored how specific technologies are creating new opportunities for brand building, from the rise of mobile marketing to the potential of branded augmented reality apps to drive engagement (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). Looking forward, scholars are now grappling with the profound implications of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the metaverse, developing conceptual frameworks to guide future marketing practice (Plangger, Grewal, Ruyter, & Tucker 2022). The most advanced conceptualizations of digital brand equity now explicitly include the role of algorithmic curation as a key antecedent, recognizing that a consumer's experience of a brand is heavily mediated by recommendation engines and personalized feeds (France et al., 2025). This highlights the current frontier of brand management which building authentic, engaging brands

within an environment that is increasingly personalized, automated, and experiential.

D. Theoretical Foundations of Digital Brand Equity

The conceptualization of Digital Brand Equity (DBE) is not a monolithic construct but rather a synthesis of several decades of evolving marketing thought. To develop a comprehensive framework for DBE, it is essential to ground it in the foundational theories that have shaped our understanding of brand value. This review delineates the theoretical pillars that support the development and categorization of the DBE dimensions, tracing the intellectual lineage from foundational, firm-centric models to contemporary, co-creative perspectives. The framework proposed in this study is built upon three core theoretical foundations which are (1) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Theory, (2) Brand Relationship Theory, and (3) the complementary perspectives of Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic and Engagement Theory.

1) Brand Relationship Theory: The Relation Foundation

While CBBE theory explains what consumers *know* about a brand, Brand Relationship Theory explains how they *feel* about and connect with it. As the digital environment evolved from a static information repository to an interactive social space, this theoretical lens became critical for understanding the deeper, more emotional drivers of brand value. Pioneered by Fournier (1998), this theory applies the constructs of interpersonal relationship theory to the consumer-brand dyad, arguing that consumers can and do form meaningful, evolving, and multifaceted relationships with brands. These relationships are not merely transactional; they are imbued with meanings of trust, commitment, intimacy, and even conflict.

2) Service-Dominant Logic and Engagement Theory:

The Co-Creative Foundation The most contemporary

theoretical support for the DBE framework comes from the complementary perspectives of Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic and Engagement Theory. These theories explain the participatory, interactive, and co-creative nature of value in the modern digital ecosystem. S-D Logic fundamentally reframes economic exchange by positing that value is not something created by a firm and delivered to a customer, but is instead always co-created through the interaction and integration of resources among multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2006, 2008). In this view, a brand is not a finished product but a value proposition that only becomes valuable when the consumer actively integrates it into their life.

This perspective provides the crucial theoretical justification for the most dynamic and advanced dimensions of DBE. Building on S-D Logic, Customer-Brand Engagement (CBE) theory identifies the specific psychological state that drives this co-creation, defining engagement as a consumer's voluntary investment of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resources into the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Brodie et al., 2011). These theories directly support the dimensions of Customer-Brand Engagement, Online Community Engagement, and Value Co-Creation & Interactivity. They explain why a passive online audience

is an obsolete concept and why the most valuable brands are those that successfully act as platforms for interaction and co-creation. This final pillar reframes the consumer as an active partner in the branding process, providing a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how brand value is built with consumers in the digital age, not just for them.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this research is to develop a contemporary conceptualization of Digital Brand Equity (DBE) and to formulate a set of testable research propositions that articulate the relationships between its core dimensions. Given that the field of digital branding is fragmented and rapidly evolving, a methodology was required that could systematically synthesize a broad and diverse body of literature to build theory. Therefore, this study employs a conceptual research design, utilizing a systematic literature review (SLR) as its primary analytical method. This approach is ideal for integrating existing knowledge, identifying core theoretical constructs, and developing a coherent, multi-dimensional framework from which future empirical research can be launched. The research procedure can be explained as in the figure 1.

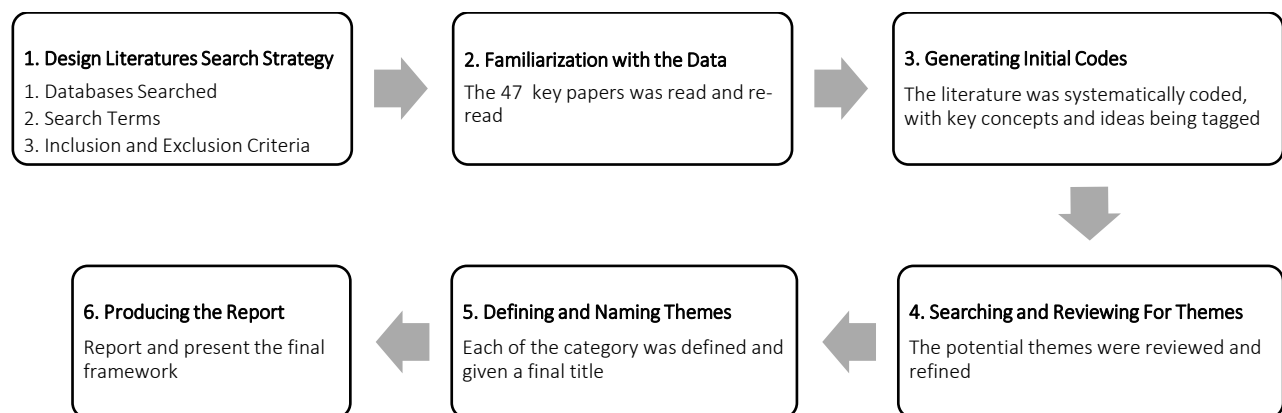


Figure 1: Research procedure

The inclusion criteria specified selecting peer-reviewed journal articles and seminal books published in English between 1990 and October 2025. Selected studies were required to have a primary focus on brand theory, digital marketing, or consumer behavior within a digital context. Furthermore, the papers needed to substantially discuss at least one of the core thematic areas, such as foundational brand equity, online branding, social media, brand engagement, or brand authenticity.

A. Design Literature Search Strategy

To ensure a comprehensive and rigorous foundation for this conceptual study, a systematic search of academic literature was conducted. The process was designed to capture the entire evolutionary arc of brand equity, from its foundational principles to its most current digital manifestations.

B. Thematic Synthesis and Analysis

Following the literature search, which yielded an initial pool of several hundred articles, a screening process based on titles, abstracts, and full-text reviews was conducted to arrive at the final of 47 key literatures. The core of the methodological approach was the analysis of these selected works through a process of thematic synthesis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. This study followed the established six-phase process for thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) as in the figure 1.

C. Validity and Reliability Check

To ensure the validity of the 47 key papers, the thematic synthesis would be subject to peer debriefing, wherein the resultant themes are reviewed by an independent expert to confirm their credibility and logical coherence against the source literature. Furthermore, inter-coder

reliability would be established by having a second researcher independently categorize the 47 key papers according to the defined thematic framework, with a high level of agreement confirming the dependability and consistency of the analytical process.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

A. Searching, Reviewing, and Synthesizing Related Literatures

The table 2 shows the result of a thematic synthesis, methodically categorizing 47 key research papers to map the evolution of brand equity. The categorization follows a clear chronological and conceptual path. It begins with the Foundational Brand Equity Concepts, grouping seminal, pre-digital works from scholars like Aaker and Keller that first defined brand equity as a measurable asset. The next theme, Transition to Online Branding, captures the initial scholarly adaptations to the internet's rise and the shift towards two-way communication. This is followed by the Social Media & User-Generated Content category, which consolidates literature focusing on the decentralization of brand control and the power of consumer-created narratives.

As the field matured, the focus deepened, leading to the emergence of themes like Customer-Brand Engagement (CBE), which groups research defining the consumer's psychological investment, and Brand Authenticity & Relationships, which focuses on the trust and genuineness required in digital interactions. Finally, the table includes two contemporary themes which are Digital Brand Equity Models & Measurement, which highlights the ongoing challenge of quantifying these new constructs, and Omni-Channel & Future Technologies, which points to the current and future research frontiers involving integrated experiences and emerging tech like AI.

Table 2: Review of previous literature which contribute to digital brand equity

Thematic Category	Description	Freq.	Key Literatures
Foundational Brand Equity Concepts	Seminal works defining brand equity, its dimensions, and measurement before the digital era.	7	Aaker (1991, 1996); Fournier (1998); Kapferer (2008); Keller (1993, 2016); Yoo & Donthu (2001)
Transition to Online Branding	Early studies exploring the internet's impact, consumer empowerment, and initial adaptations of brand equity for an online context.	6	Christodoulides et al. (2006); Hoffman & Novak (1996); Horppu, Kuivalainen, Tarkiainen, & Ellonen (2008); Kucuk (2008); Levine et al. (2000); Urban (2004)
Social Media & User-Generated Content	Research focusing on the role of social media platforms and user-created content in shaping brand perceptions and equity.	8	Culotta & Cutler (2016); de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang (2012); Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010); Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Mangold & Faulds (2009); Whitelock et al. (2013); Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016); Stephen (2016)
Customer-Brand Engagement (CBE)	Literature defining, conceptualizing, and measuring the consumer's psychological investment and active relationship with a brand.	6	Brodie et al. (2011); Dessart et al. (2015); Hollebeek et al. (2014); Kumar & Pansari (2016); van Doorn et al. (2010); Brodie et al. (2011)
Brand Authenticity & Relationships	Studies examining the importance of trust, genuineness, and relational dynamics in building and maintaining digital brand value.	6	Fournier & Alvarez (2012); Grayson & Martinec (2004); Morhart et al. (2015); Schallehn, Burmann, Riley (2014); Labrecque et al. (2013)
Digital Brand Equity Models & Measurement	Papers that explicitly propose or test models and measurement scales for brand equity in a digital or social media context.	8	Baldus et al. (2015); France et al. (2025); Samarah Samarah, Bayram, Aljuhmani, & Elrehail (2022); Butt et al. (2018); Szántó, Papp-Váry, & Radácsi (2025); Medvedieva (2023)
Omni-Channel & Future Technologies	Forward-looking research on integrated customer experiences, emerging technologies (AR, AI), and the future of digital branding.	6	Angelidou (2017); Bijmolt et al. (2021); Grewal, Hulland, Kopalle, & Karahanna (2020); Plangger et al. (2022); Tafesse & Wien (2018); Verhoef et al. (2015)

B. Definition of Digital Brand Equity

The Table 3 summarizes the previous literatures which propose related-definition of Digital Brand Equity (DBE), demonstrating the evolving understanding of brand value in the digital era. Christodoulides et al. (2006) provided an early, foundational definition, adapting traditional brand equity principles to the online environment through a conceptual literature review. Their work highlighted the need to consider online-specific assets and liabilities.

Subsequently, Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie (2014), while not directly defining DBE, introduced the crucial concept of Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) as a multi-faceted cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity. Their conceptual framework for CBE became instrumental in understanding the active role of consumers in value creation, a core element now widely recognized within DBE. Butt et al. (2018) offered an empirical perspective, defining e-retail brand equity specifically for online retail

contexts. Their survey-based research empirically identified factors like website usability and online trust as critical drivers, reinforcing the importance of the digital interface in value perception. More recent conceptualizations include Ionescu et al. (2023), who, through a literature review, broadly defined DBE as the collective value and perception constructed via all digital marketing channels. Finally, France, Davcik, & Kazandjian (2025) presented a forward-looking conceptual framework, explicitly integrating the

complex interplay of firm-generated content, user-generated content, and algorithmic curation as fundamental drivers of digital brand value. Collectively, these papers illustrate a progression from adapting traditional brand equity to digital contexts, to emphasizing consumer engagement, to empirically validating online drivers, and finally, to embracing the multifaceted, co-created, and algorithm-mediated nature of modern DBE.

Table 3: Summary of related-definition of digital brand equity

Definition of Related-Digital Brand Equity	Key Findings	Model Role	Citation
The overall assessment of a brand that is formed from all of its online activities.	The study found that both firm-created social media communication (e.g., brand posts) and user-generated content (e.g., online comments) have significant, positive, and distinct effects on the dimensions of brand equity (brand awareness and brand image).	<u>Dependent Variable</u> The study examined how different types of social media communication (independent variables) build brand equity.	Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016)
Defined e-retail brand equity as the value added to products/services as perceived by consumers, driven by factors unique to the electronic retail context.	Website usability, security, and a favorable online experience were identified as significant antecedents to building brand equity for an online retailer. The model confirmed that a quality digital presence is a prerequisite for brand value.	<u>Dependent Variable</u> The research modeled the key drivers (antecedents) that lead to the creation of brand equity for an online store.	Butt et al. (2018)
A set of assets (or liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers in an online environment.	This foundational paper proposed a model where online brand equity is built from dimensions like emotional connection, online experience, and responsiveness. It argued that DBE is a distinct construct from offline equity.	<u>Central Construct</u> The paper's primary goal was to define and conceptualize this construct, positioning it as a key asset to be built and managed online.	Christodoulides et al. (2006)
While not a direct definition of DBE, their framework for Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) as a consumer's "positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity" became a core component of how modern DBE is understood.	The study validated a scale for measuring engagement and argued that it is a key psychological state that precedes loyalty and other positive brand outcomes. Engagement is a critical process in building brand value online.	<u>Mediating Variable</u> Engagement is positioned as the psychological process that connects brand activities (antecedents) with brand equity outcomes (consequences).	Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie (2014)

Table 3: Summary of related-definition of digital brand equity (cont.)

Definition of Related-Digital Brand Equity	Key Findings	Model Role	Citation
A multidimensional construct comprising brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, as manifested and experienced by consumers through a brand's social media presence.	The study found that a brand's social media marketing efforts positively influence its social media brand equity, which in turn leads to a greater intention to purchase from the brand.	<u>Mediating Variable</u> Social media brand equity was modeled as the bridge that connects a firm's marketing efforts on social media to the consumer's purchase intention.	Kim & Ko

Based on the comprehensive review of academic literature from 1990 to the present, and synthesizing the contributions of key scholars, Digital Brand Equity (DBE) can be defined as:

“The cumulative value a brand accrues from its strategic and continuous engagement with consumers across all digital touchpoints, encompassing the sum of enhanced brand salience, positive brand associations, superior perceived digital quality and experience, deep customer-brand engagement, thriving online communities, transparent brand authenticity, and collaborative value co-creation, which collectively drive consumer trust, loyalty, and advocacy.”

This definition integrates the foundational principles of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) with the unique characteristics and dynamics of the digital environment, acknowledging the shift towards consumer empowerment, co-creation, and relational engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014; France et al., 2025; Vargo & Lusch, 2006). It highlights that DBE is not merely a translation of offline brand equity, but a distinct construct shaped by interactivity, user-generated content, and algorithmic mediation.

C. Research Propositions

The development of these seven research propositions is the direct and logical outcome of the thematic synthesis conducted on the 47 key literatures. The thematic analysis serves as a systematic process to distill a vast and complex body of research into coherent themes, and these propositions represent the formalized, testable hypotheses that emerge from the insights gleaned from those themes. The link between the analysis and the propositions is that each proposition is a synthesized statement of the relationships consistently identified or theoretically argued for within the literature corresponding to each dimension as shown in the figure 2.

Theme of Digital Brand Salience emerged from synthesizing the foundational works of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), who established brand awareness as a prerequisite for equity, with more recent studies like Christodoulides et al. (2006), who adapted this concept for the digital context where being "top-of-mind" translates to visibility in search and social media. The analysis revealed a consistent pattern: without this initial cognitive footprint, no further brand-building can occur. This directly led to Proposition 1, which formalizes this foundational role.

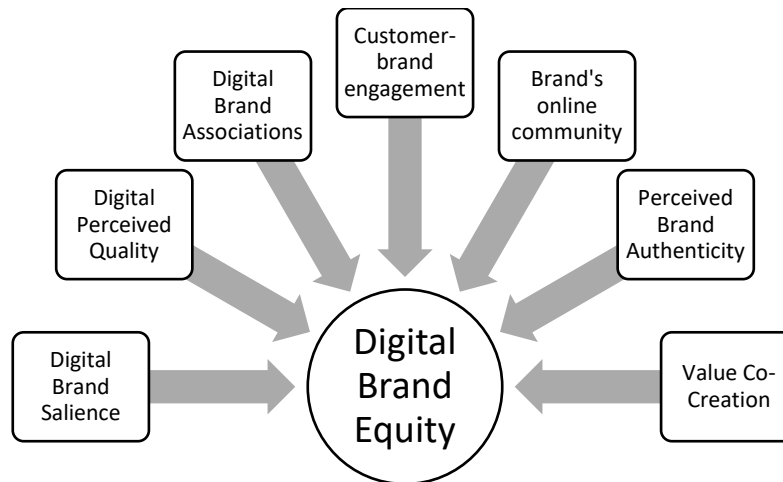


Figure 2: Digital brand equity conceptual model

Proposition 1: When a brand is easily recognized and recalled online, it is more likely to be considered by consumers during their decision-making process, which is the first step in building its digital brand equity.

Similarly, the thematic analysis of literature on Digital Perceived Quality combined insights from early measurement studies that linked marketing mix elements to quality perception (Yoo & Donthu, 2001) with contemporary research on the omni-channel customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The recurring theme was that a seamless and reliable digital interface acts as a primary signal of a brand's overall quality and trustworthiness, a relationship articulated in Proposition 2.

Proposition 2: A consumer's judgment of a brand's digital quality, based on a positive and reliable experience with its website and apps, directly builds trust and a better overall brand perception.

The synthesis of literature on social media's impact (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) and brand personality highlighted the theme of Digital Brand Associations, where a brand's value is contingent on its alignment with consumer identity, leading to Proposition 3.

Proposition 3: When a brand's online image and values align with a consumer's own identity, it strengthens the consumer's positive attitude toward that brand.

The powerful theme of Customer-Brand Engagement was synthesized from a specific body of literature that defines engagement as a deep psychological investment beyond mere transactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Brodie et al., 2011), forming the basis for Proposition 4, which posits engagement as a mediator to loyalty.

Proposition 4: Customer-brand engagement, which is the time and energy a consumer invests in a brand, acts as a bridge between good brand experiences and the development of genuine loyalty and advocacy.

The literature on Online Community (Baldus et al., 2015) and Perceived Brand Authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015; Fournier, 1998) provided the clear themes that a sense of belonging and genuineness are critical drivers of trust and commitment, which are formalized in Propositions 5 and 6.

Proposition 5: A strong sense of belonging within a brand's online community is a key reason consumers stay loyal, even beyond their satisfaction with the product.

Proposition 6: When a brand is perceived as authentic in its digital communications, it increases consumer trust and emotional commitment, making them less skeptical of its marketing messages.

Finally, the most contemporary theme, Value Co-Creation, emerged from synthesizing forward-looking works on Service-Dominant Logic and consumer empowerment (Samarah et al. 2022), leading to Proposition 7, which hypothesizes that interactivity and participation foster the highest levels of loyalty. In essence, the thematic analysis acted as an intellectual bridge, transforming the collective knowledge from 47 distinct papers into seven clear, synthesized, and testable research propositions.

Proposition 7: A consumer's active participation in value co-creation and their sense that the brand is interactive fosters a feeling of psychological ownership, which leads to the strongest forms of brand loyalty.

The proposed seven-dimensional Digital Brand Equity (DBE) framework is based on a literature synthesis and requires empirical validation. The model is also presented universally, without accounting for significant variations across different industries or cultural contexts, and it may not fully capture the impact of rapidly emerging technologies.

This seven-dimensional framework provides managers with a robust tool to move beyond simple vanity metrics and measure the true performance of their digital brand equity. It offers a clear way to track and justify strategic investments in relational dimensions like perceived authenticity, online community health, and value co-creation. By adopting these more nuanced metrics, firms can more effectively allocate resources to the digital activities that build genuine, long-term consumer loyalty.

These limitations highlight clear directions for future research. The most critical next step is the empirical

validation of the framework and its measurement scales using quantitative methods like structural equation modeling (SEM). Subsequent studies should investigate the specific antecedents, such as different digital marketing strategies, and the financial consequences of a strong DBE. Furthermore, research is needed to test the model's generalizability across diverse cultural and industrial settings. Finally, future work must continually adapt the framework to account for the influence of emerging technologies like AI, Web3, and the metaverse on how brand value is co-created and perceived, ensuring the concept of DBE remains relevant and robust.

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