SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

WILEY

Effect of online social media marketing efforts on customer response

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Abstract

It has been a challenge to map the efficacy of marketing communications in building stronger brands on social media. Given the paucity of research in this area, the present study offers a holistic model that maps the effect of social media marketing (hereinafter SMMEs) on consumer response via building brand equity and brand trust. This study was conducted on customers of major brands of smartphones in India. The data were collected from 318 consumers who visited fan pages of the selected brands of smartphones. The current study examines how SMMEs influence customer behavior via brand equity and trust. Additionally, the study examines how brand equity and brand trust interact during the process. The current study's findings indicate that brand equity partially mediates the effect of SMMEs on customer response. On the other hand, SMMEs do not succeed in converting brand trust into customer response. Further, brand equity fully mediates SMMEs' effect on brand trust. Finally, the results also show that the effect of brand equity on customer response is partially mediated by brand trust. Toward the end, study dwells on its practical implications and limitations.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Given the scale and reach of social media, which is enormous and multilevel (Vivek et al., 2012), its implications for branding are noteworthy (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). While developing brand equity in the age of social media remains a difficult task for businesses, it does provide a plethora of opportunities for businesses to grow their brands (Holt, 2016). It has emerged as a valuable tool for building brand reputation (Lim et al., 2020) and customer intimacy (Bazi et al., 2020). Further, it also enhances customer engagement (Sashi, 2012). As a result, it becomes easier to transform customers into brand communities (Richardson et al., 2020) since social media facilitates an effective mapping of their decision-making processes (Colicev et al., 2018). According to Keller (1993), brand equity influences a customer's knowledge and exposure to a brand through marketing mix, eliciting a wide variety of favorable responses. Given the ubiquity and omnipresence of social media, a business's abilities to influence a customer's knowledge spectrum about a brand or brand equity have grown exponentially. Keller (2001) argued that a positive shift in brand trust, that is, a relationship's dependability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994),

is one of the critical customer responses that could be observed as a result. Furthermore, when consumers have a high level of trust in a business, they expect consistency in terms of superior performance and adherence to high standards or norms.

It is widely accepted that marketers must adopt a more systematic approach to social media marketing efforts to boost consumer satisfaction and foster positive word-of-mouth (WoM), among other benefits (Court et al., 2009; Paul, 2019). Keller (2016a) advocated for additional research into the functions of branding in a digital world. The impact of a company's SMMEs on branding and customer response has piqued the interest of researchers. However, the majority of prior research concentrated only on how brand equity (e.g., Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Kumar & Paul, 2018; Paul, 2018; Seo & Park, 2018) or brand trust (Hafez, 2021; Laroche et al., 2013) partially mediated the effect of SMMEs on a customer's response. The studies that attempted to provide a comprehensive picture by including both, that is, brand equity and brand trust, as mediating variables (Ebrahim, 2020; Sanny et al., 2020) failed to retain their constituents, thereby offering only a fragmented picture.

Furthermore, previous research models were designed to predict only one customer response at a time, such as loyalty or willingness to pay a higher price (henceforth as WTPPP). As a result, there has been a dearth of studies that provide a comprehensive model that helps to fully comprehend the role of SMMEs in eliciting a favorable response from customers, if any. The current study attempts to fills this void by proposing a holistic model that incorporates SMMEs, critical components of Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model, brand trust, and a wide variety of customer responses, including willingness to pay a premium price (WTPPP), brand preference, and brand loyalty. Brand trust has been included in the model since previous research (e.g., Ebrahim, 2020) indicates that it has a positive effect on brand equity. However, in light of the review, the current study proposes the opposite, namely that brand equity has a positive effect on brand trust.

India's digital journey has been exhilarating. In 2020, the country had the world's second-largest internet population, with over 749 million users; 744 million of these users accessed the internet through their mobile phones. Estimates suggest that by 2040, this figure will have risen to more than 1.5 billion (Keelery, 2021). In 2020, smartphone penetration in India reached 54%, with a projected increase to 96% by 2040, more than doubling from the previous fiscal year, when only 22% of mobile subscribers used a smartphone. In 2020, the total number of smartphone shipments in India was around 149.7 million. Xiaomi was the most popular brand at the end of 2020 (Sun, 2021). The future is bright for smartphone manufacturers in India. This study will pave the path for smartphone manufacturers to develop branding strategies to ensure the desired customer response in India.

The objectives of the present research are:

a. To examine the potential mediating effect of brand equity on the relationship between SMMEs and customer response.
b. To examine the potential mediating effect of brand equity on the relationship between SMMEs and brand trust.
c. To examine the potential mediating effect of brand trust on the relationship between brand equity and customer response.
d. To determine whether brand trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between brand equity and customer response.

The study has been undertaken in respect of consumers of smartphones in India. In India, smartphone brands are exceptionally active on social media platforms, and they have assumed the frontrunners position on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 | SMME and brand equity

2.1.1 | SMMEs

Experts consider social media marketing as a mere transposition of marketing concept to the realm of social media (Alves et al., 2016).

Tuten and Solomon (2017, p. 53) defined social media marketing as "the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders." Kim and Ko (2012) classified SMMEs into five categories based on consumer perceptions of luxury goods: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth (WoM). The primary focus of social media marketing research has been to create value through "a revealing communication on some promotional information" (Dwivedi et al., 2015, p. 291). It is to utilize social media to not only disseminate brand information to customers but at the same time to build and manage relationships with them through a two-way interaction (Berthon et al., 2012; Cheung et al., 2020).

SMMEs are unique since they infuse business organizations with dynamism. Additionally, they also help businesses by enhancing their brand value. This is accomplished through customer engagement (Kim & Ko, 2012), active interactions (Van Dijk, 2005), sharing (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), co-creation (Filo et al., 2015), collaboration (Richter & Koch, 2007), enriching experiences (Williams & Chinn, 2010), real-time updates, effective service failure response, and so forth. Additionally, SMMEs contribute by incorporating the user perspective via a multi-directional technological platform that empowers both customers and businesses. As the socio-technical theory of innovation (Geels, 2004) argues, this results in an increase in the perceived value of offerings. By effectively utilizing social media, businesses can gain a real-time understanding of their customers' preferences, needs, and desires as well (Moran & Gossieaux, 2010) and respond accordingly. Additionally, their ability to connect consumers in a way that they can view, share, endorse, or contradict one another's responses further enrich the collaborative co-creation process (Kamboj et al., 2018). Similar beliefs and self-concepts shared by members of the same online community further aid marketers in better understanding and responding to them (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Additionally, marketers gain the ability to reconnect with customers who had fallen into oblivion in the absence of such a ubiquitous and multiuser platform. What differentiates these platforms is their capacity to double as external brand communication channels (Berry, 2000). Finally, social media platform management is critical for businesses because it enables them to function effectively in an environment where they have limited control over the content consumers consume, contribute, share, like, endorse, and so forth.

2.1.2 | Brand equity

Blackston (2000, p. 101) argued that David Ogilvy's definition of brand as "the consumer's perception of a product" demonstrates the critical value of brand equity. In his seminal contribution, Aaker (1991) proposed five components of brand equity: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets (Kumar & Paul, 2018). Later, Keller (1993) proposed the concept of CBBE and elaborated it as a combination of brand awareness and brand image that strengthens brand knowledge, resulting in

a "differential effect on the customer's response" (1993, p. 1). Keller's (1993) assertion about SMMEs having a differential effect on customer response demonstrates its critical role in optimizing the marketing mix.

2.1.3 | Brand image

Keller (1993) defined brand image as a customer's perception and preference for a brand based on its characteristics, benefits, and personality (Plummer, 1985), against the backdrop of associative network memory theory (Anderson & Bower, 1973). These perceptions and preferences form associations, which serve as brand memory nodes. These nodes can be further be classified according to their favorability, strength, positivity, abstractness, and uniqueness.

Such associations assist brands in eliciting a distinctive response from customers, especially in instances of high involvement products or services (Petty et al., 1983; Paul, 2019; 2020). Numerous studies have established a positive correlation between SMMEs and brand image (e.g., Godey et al., 2016). According to Kapferer (2011), businesses establish a brand identity by ingraining a brand image on the minds of their customers. Additionally, he argued that SMMEs facilitate the formation of the desired brand image (Kapferer, 2011). Furthermore, by instilling positive brand perceptions in consumers' minds, SMMEs attempts to strengthen the bond between customers and brands (Laroche et al., 2013).

2.1.4 | Brand awareness

Brand awareness ranges from complete brand ignorance to complete certainty of the brand's existence. (Aaker, 1991; Joshi & Garg, 2021). According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness is one of the components of brand equity. He defined brand awareness as "the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). Typically, this top-of-the-mind recall of a brand (Netemeyer et al., 2004) is about the brand's uniqueness and is elicited by a cue (Berry, 2000). The ability of a consumer to recall and recognize a brand in distinct situations demonstrates how deep-routed it is in the memory structure of a customer (Keller, 1993). Keller (1993) further argued that this ability could be used to evaluate performance regarding brand awareness. According to Ramsøy and Skov (2014), favorable brand preference increases the likelihood of recall. Berry (2000) contended that a company's success in marketing its products or services is directly proportional to its brand awareness.

Numerous studies have established that SMMEs have a positive effect on brand equity (e.g., Schivinski et al., 2021; Seo & Park, 2018). According to Algharabat et al.'s (2020) study of Facebook fan pages, consumer brand engagement increases brand awareness and brand association. Seo and Park (2018) observed in their study of airline passengers that SMMEs have a positive effect on brand awareness. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016), in their study of 60 brands,

observed that firm-created and user-generated social media content had a positive effect on brand awareness. According to Lee and Watkins (2016), video blogs improved viewers' brand-imagery fit with luxury items when viewed against the backdrop of para-social interaction theory and social comparison theory. Another study of 845 consumers of luxury goods in four countries reaffirmed the critical role of SMMEs in brand equity development (Godey et al., 2016).

Thus, we propose that:

> **H1.** *SMMEs will have a direct and positive relationship with brand equity.*

2.2 | SMMEs, brand equity, and brand trust

Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23) defined trust as "confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity." Such beliefs are the result of a back-end calculation balancing the benefit of the relationship against the cost of serving the customer (Doney & Cannon, 1997). According to Blackston (2000), brand trust is more about developing intimacy with customers than it is about establishing high reliability and credibility. Intimacy connects and binds a customer to a brand. It is about demonstrating a company's level of empathy for its customers. As a result, he adds, even if a brand's reliability and credibility are high, a lack of intimacy implies a lack of brand trust. Finally, trust-related beliefs manifest themselves in behavioral intent (Moorman et al., 1992). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001, p. 82) defined brand trust as "the average consumer's willingness to rely on the brand's ability to perform its stated role," citing Moorman et al. (1992) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). The value of brand trust is bolstered by more subtle differences among brands that confuse the minds of customers (Doney & Cannon, 1997).

Earlier research indicates that SMMEs contribute to the development of brand trust (e.g., Kamboj et al., 2018) both directly (e.g., Gretry et al., 2017) as well as indirectly (e.g., Dwivedi & McDonald, 2020). For example, Laroche et al. (2013) argued that brand communities on social media could aid in the development of brand trust by strengthening various facets of relationships between customers, products, companies, and brands. Jun et al. (2017), in their study, contended that SMMEs help build social capital, which in turn has a positive effect on brand trust. According to Yu and Yuan (2019), brand experience on social media acts as a mediator between SMMEs and brand trust. On the contrary, numerous other studies demonstrate that SMMEs have a direct effect on brand trust (e.g., Ebrahim, 2020; Hajli, 2014; Jain et al., 2018; Kamboj et al., 2018).

The majority of the above-mentioned studies did not incorporate brand equity into their models. As a result, they failed to highlight the interdependence of SMMEs, brand equity, and brand trust in eliciting a positive response from customers. Additionally, the literature is divided on whether brand trust builds brand equity (Chen, 2010; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005) or vice versa (Esch et al., 2006; Han et al., 2015; Sürücü et al., 2019). By incorporating all the three referred variables into their model, namely SMMEs, brand equity, and brand trust, Ebrahim (2020) argued that SMMEs have a direct effect on brand trust.

Additionally, his research highlights that brand trust acts as a mediator of the SMMEs' effect on brand equity.

In contrast to Ebrahim (2020), the current study proposes that brand trust, which is critical in developing intimacy with customers (Blackston, 2000), is one of the vital outcomes of resilient brand equity. Due to the diversity of actors in a social media context, brand trust is not expected to act as a full mediator (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Jain et al., 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, we propose:

> **H2.** *SMMEs will have a direct and positive relationship with brand trust.*

> **H3.** *Brand equity will partially mediate the effect of SMMEs on brand trust.*

2.2.1 | Brand equity and customer response

Keller's (1993) concept of differential customer response manifests itself in a variety of ways. Customer responses such as brand preference, brand loyalty, and WTPPP are regarded as significant customer responses. We, too, used the referred customer responses as endogenous variables in the current study.

2.2.2 | Brand preference

Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) included two products in their study: one from a high-involvement category, namely hotels, and another from a low-involvement category, namely household cleaners. Their study concluded that in both the cases, resilient brand equity exhibited a positive effect on consumer preference. Myers's (2003) study also supported that brand equity influences consumer preferences in high-involvement categories. His study earmarked soft drinks as a high involvement category. Chang and Liu (2009) also confirmed, using data from 18 service brands across three categories, that services with superior brand equity influenced customer preference positively. Godey et al. (2016) corroborated the positive effect of better brand equity on customers' response in the case of luxury goods. Furthermore, Colicev et al. (2018) asserted that earned social media also has a positive effect on consumer preferences. Numerous additional studies have produced similar findings (e.g., Naylor et al., 2012).

2.2.3 | Brand loyalty

There are three prevalent viewpoints on the relationship between brand loyalty and brand equity. The first, advanced by Aaker (1991, 1996) and endorsed by Keller (1993, 2003), regards brand loyalty as a component of brand equity. Aaker (1996) included loyalty and price premium in his list of 10 indicators of brand equity. Importantly, this

perspective is used in arriving at the value of brand equity (Anselmsson et al., 2014; Kaynak et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2011). According to the second line of research, brand loyalty is regarded as a predictor of brand equity (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo et al., 2000). Finally, Erdem and Swait (1998), against the backdrop of signaling theory, argued that brand loyalty is a consequence of brand equity, not an antecedent, or a predictor. Keller's (2001) subsequent refinements of his contribution reaffirmed this view. Keller (2001) arranged the four components of brand equity hierarchically against the backdrop of the value chain model. He argued that the first building block in the proposed model is brand awareness, while the fourth one is brand resonance, which includes brand loyalty. Numerous research studies (e.g., Sürücü et al., 2019) provide empirical support for this argument. The current study advances and examines the final position.

2.2.4 | WTPPP

Premium prices act as a proxy for the degree of demand elasticity (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). According to Aaker (1992, 1996), commanding a premium price exemplifies brand equity. Furthermore, it adds value to a business (Aaker, 1992) by generating incremental cash flows (Farquhar, 1989). Motameni and Shahrokhi (1998) calculated global brand equity in this vein by taking into account a brand's earnings. Numerous studies support the ability of brand equity to command a premium price (e.g., Kumar et al., 2020; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Paul, 2015). Faircloth et al. (2001) demonstrated through an experimental study that increased brand equity could command a premium price. Netemeyer et al. (2004) proposed three fundamental characteristics of CBBE as predictors of WTPPP: brand value, brand uniqueness, and brand quality. According to Anselmsson et al. (2014), the strongest predictor of WTPPP is the brand image. In the case of luxury goods, Godey et al. (2016) established a positive correlation between brand equity and price premium. Tasci (2018) too supported a positive correlation between brand equity and WTPPP while examining the cross-brand and cross-market validity of the CBBE model.

The current study attempts to gauge the effect of SMMEs on a broader spectrum of customer responses, namely, brand preference, brand loyalty, and WTPPP, contrary to many other studies that singularly focused on one outcome (e.g., Berthon et al., 2012; Dessart et al., 2015; Laroche et al., 2013; Sanny et al., 2020). Several studies have indicated partial mediation by brand equity in the context of SMME (Garanti & Kissi, 2019; Yulianto et al., 2021). Thus,

> **H4.** *Brand equity has a positive and direct relationship with customer response, namely, brand preference, willingness to pay a premium price, and brand loyalty.*

> **H5.** *Brand equity partially mediates the effect of SMMEs on customer response, namely, brand preference, willingness to pay a premium price, and brand loyalty.*

2.3 | SMME, brand trust, and consumer response

In the context of social media, research indicates that positive customer response is a result of a brand's high level of trust (e.g., Jakic et al., 2017). Two lines of research exist on the relationship between SMMEs, brand trust, and customer response. According to the first line of research, brand trust acts as a mediator between SMMEs and customer response (e.g., Ebrahim, 2020). The second line of research argues that the effect of SMME-created brand trust on customer response is mediated by brand equity (e.g., Yu & Yuan, 2019).

Dwivedi and McDonald (2020) investigated whether SMMEs' influence on customers' WTPPP is mediated by the brand trust or brand attitude. The outcome of the study indicated that both of them fully mediate the effect of SMMEs on customer response. In another study, Nevzat et al. (2016) concluded that SMMEs, which result in students' identification with and subsequent loyalty to the University, are mediated by brand trust. Similarly, according to a study conducted by Hajli (2014), social media plays a positive role in establishing a customer's trust, which ultimately manifests as their intention to purchase. The current study takes the former position, arguing that brand trust acts as a mediator between SMMEs and customer response, but with some caveats. Though there are studies that support the direct effect of SMMEs on customer response (e.g., Godey et al., 2016; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015), the current study, in the backdrop of the review, hypothesizes that the brand trust partially mediates SMMEs' effect on customer response.

Therefore, we propose that:

> **H6.** *Brand trust has a positive and direct relationship with customer response, namely, brand preference, willingness to pay a premium price, and brand loyalty.*

> **H7.** *Brand trust partially mediates the effect of SMME on customer response, namely, brand preference, willingness to pay a premium price, and brand loyalty.*

2.4 | Brand equity, brand trust, and consumer response

The brand is viewed as a means of establishing trust, thereby facilitating the process of developing brand equity (Dash et al., 2021; Jevons & Gabbott, 2000). Berry (2000, p. 136) observed that "strong brands increase customers' trust of invisible products while helping them to understand better and visualize what they are buying." Two lines of research that establish a connection between brand equity and brand trust have found support in the literature. The first line of research affirms brand trust as a mediator between brand equity and customer response (Chen, 2010; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Ebrahim, 2020). The second line of research considers brand trust as a consequence of brand equity (Esch et al., 2006; Foroudi, 2019; Han et al., 2015; Sürücü et al., 2019). The present study examines the second line of research.

Esch et al. (2006) argued that brand equity has no direct effect on future purchases. Instead, brand equity affects future purchases by building relationships in the form of brand trust. Chen's (2010) research provided additional support for the notion that trust acts as a mediator between brand image and brand equity. In another study, Foroudi (2019) observed that brand awareness and brand association affect consumer response through increasing brand reliability.

Although studies have looked into the direct effect of brand equity on consumer response in the context of SMME (e.g., Dwivedi et al., 2019; Ebrahim, 2020; Sanny et al., 2020), only a few have examined the partial mediation of such an effect by the brand trust.

Therefore, we propose that:

> **H8.** *Brand trust partially mediates the relationship between brand equity and customer response, namely, brand preference, willingness to pay a premium price, and brand loyalty.*

3 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Sample profile

The study's population consisted of smartphone users in India who followed smartphone brands on social media platforms. We chose four smartphone brands, Xiaomi, Apple, Samsung, and OnePlus, based on their social media following (Table 3). We shared a link to our questionnaire on official Indian fan pages created by companies on Facebook, inviting customers who liked those pages to complete it. Selecting the brand's respective Facebook pages ensured that their prospective respondents received both firm-generated and user-generated content. The survey was conducted over 8 weeks in June and July 2020. Due to Facebook's widespread use and popularity in

TABLE 1 Sample profile and data collection mode

		N	Percentage
Gender	Male	190	59.7
	Female	128	40.3
Smartphone brand	Xiaomi	80	25.1
	Samsung	94	29.6
	Apple	70	22.1
	OnePlus	74	23.2
Income (annual)	Below USD 6750	201	63.2
	USD 6751 to USD 13,500	90	28.3
	Above USD 13,500	27	8.5
Age group	15 to 18 years	49	15.4
	19 to 30 years	246	77.4
	31 to 40 years	17	5.3
	41 to 50 years	6	1.9

Note: Median age in India is 28.4 years (O'Neill, 2021).

TABLE 2 Sources of instrument

S. no	Constructs	Sources
1	**SMME** (05 factors) **Entertainment** 1. Using smartphone brand's social media is fun. 2. Contents shown in smartphone brand's social media seem interesting. **Interaction** 1. Smartphone brand's social media enables information sharing with others. 2. Conversation or opinion e[X]change with others is possible through smartphone brand's social media. 3. It is easy to deliver my opinion through smartphone brand's social media. **Trendiness** 1. Contents shown in smartphone brand's social media is the newest information. 2. Using smartphone brand's social media is very trendy. **Customization** 1. Smartphone brand's social media offers customized information search. 2. Smartphone brand's social media provides customized service. **Word of mouth** 1. I would like to pass along information on brand, product, or services from smartphone brand's social media to my friends. 2. I would like to upload contents from smartphone brand's social media on my blog or micro blog.	Kim and Ko (2012)
2	**Brand equity** (02 factors) **Brand awareness** 1. I am always aware of [X]. 2. Characteristics of [X] come to my mind quickly. 3. I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of [X]. **Brand image** 1. [X] brand is a leading smartphone company. 2. [X] brand has extensive experience. 3. [X] brand is a representative of the smartphone industry. 4. [X] brand is a customer-oriented company.	Kim and Hyun (2011)
3	**Brand trust (02 factors)** **Fiability** 1. With brand [X] I obtain what I look for in a [product]. 2. Brand [X] is always at my consumption expectations level. 3. Brand [X] gives me confidence and certainty in the consumption of a [product]. 4. Brand [X] never disappoints me. **Intentionality** 1. Brand [X] would be honest and sincere in its explanations. 2. I could rely on Brand [X]. 3. Brand [X] would make any effort to make me be satisfied. 4. Brand [X] would repay me in some way for the problem with the product.	Munuera-Aleman et al. (2003)
4	**Consumer response** (03 factors) **Brand preference** 1. Although another brand has the same features as [X]. 2. I would prefer to purchase from [X]. 3. If another brand does not differ from [X], it seems smarter to purchase from [X]. 4. Although there is another brand as good as [X], I prefer to buy from [X]. **Willingness to pay a premium price** 1. The price of [X] brand would have to increase quite a bit before I would switch to another brand. 2. I am willing to pay a higher price for [X] brand than for other brands. 3. I am willing to pay a lot more for [X] brand than for other brands. 4. I am willing to pay ___% more for [X] brand over other brands: 0%, 5% □ 10%, 15%, 20%, 25%, 30% and more **Brand loyalty** 1. I will suggest [X] brand to other consumers. 2. I would love to recommend [X] brand to my friends. 3. I regularly visit [X] brand. 4. I intend to visit [X] brand again. 5. I am satisfied with [X] brand with every visit. 6. [X] brand would be my first choice.	Kim and Hyun (2011) Netemeyer et al. (2004) Aaker (1991); Yoo et al. (2000)

India, the study focused exclusively on it. The respondents were assured that their responses would remain confidential.

Out of 370 self-administered questionnaires, 318 (86%) responses were complete and considered for further data analysis. There were 174 males and 144 females among the final respondents. Most respondents used social media for over 6 h per week. One hundred and eighty-nine respondents (59.4%) earned under USD 6750 per year. Ninety-nine respondents (31.1%) had an annual income of USD 6751 to USD 13,500. Thirty people (9.4%) were from the Above USD 13,500 income bracket. The majority of respondents were divided into two age groups: 77.4% were between 19 and 30 years, and 15.4% were between 15 and 18 years. The remaining responders were over the age of 30. (7.2%) (Table 1).

3.2 | Questionnaire and measures

The instruments used to collect data were successfully tested for reliability and validity in other studies (see Table 2). In the original instrument, the responses were recorded using a five-point Likert-type scale. The current research utilized a seven-point Likert-type scale. It enhances both the instrument's reliability (Symonds, 1924) as well as accuracy (Colman et al., 1997; Johns, 2010). The anchors for scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Additionally, a pre-test was conducted on the questionnaire to assess the face validity of the questionnaire. The pre-test was designed to evaluate clarity, comprehensibility, response format correctness, and readability. Twenty people were asked to give the questionnaire a score based on these five criteria. All of the parameters of the questionnaire were above average. Secondly, the questionnaire was validated for content validity by five professors and five practitioners in branding. The mode of data collection was online. A question was also asked to ascertain respondents' Indian citizenship.

Three qualifying questions were used to elicit responses to questionnaires. The first question was to confirm their Indian nationality. The second question was whether they own and use one of the four

TABLE 3 Presence on social media—smartphone brands (as of January 2021)

Smartphone brands	Social media presence
Xiaomi	Facebook—10,688,802 Followers, YouTube—1.53 Million Subscribers, 215,724,222 Views, Twitter—2.8 Million Followers
Samsung	Facebook—160,938,160 Followers, YouTube—5.46 Million Subscribers, 948,714,297 Views, Twitter—12.3 Million Followers
Apple	Facebook—13,368,292 Followers, YouTube—13.8 Million Subscribers, 767,152,684, Views, Twitter—6 Million Followers
OnePlus	Facebook—12,995,203 Followers, YouTube—1.25 Million Subscribers, 400,136,063 Views, Twitter—2.3 Million Followers

smartphone brands, Xiaomi, Samsung, Apple, or Oneplus. The third question inquired about duration, from when the respondents were following/liked the FaceBook page of the brand. Six months is considered appropriate to experience and consume SMME (Bazi et al., 2020). Respondents who liked their respective fan pages at least 6 months ago were directed to the survey's next page.

4 | DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 | Common-method variance test

In accordance with the recommendations by Podsakoff et al. (2003), the current study employed Harman's (1976) one-factor test. All items were subjected to factor analysis using principal component analysis along with varimax rotation. This process resulted in the extraction of 13 factors from construct items used in the current study, namely entertainment, trendiness, interaction, customization, word of mouth, brand preference, brand loyalty, WTPPP, BTI, BTF, brand association, brand image, and brand awareness. The rotation converged in 11 iterations. The diffused outcome indicates the absence of common method bias.

4.2 | Analysis of measurement model

Unlike CB-SEM, PLS-SEM is not constrained by strict data assumptions (Dash & Paul, 2021; Hair et al., 2011). The reliability and validity of reflective and formative models require distinct considerations (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2019). Since the present model consisted of constructs with only reflective indicators and higher-order models, a repeated indicators approach was used to analyze the model (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

To begin, we assessed the psychometric properties of the data. The reliability of the constructs was determined using Cronbach Alpha, the size of item loadings, and construct reliability (CR). Convergent validity was determined using item loadings and average variance (AVE). Finally, discriminant validity was determined using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015).

The reliability and validity of higher-order models were determined in two steps. First, Cronbach Alpha, construct reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) values were recorded. These values are automatically retrieved by the software. The second step involved manually calculating the reliability and AVE of higher-order constructs. The same was obtained by using the loading of higher-level constructs onto their lower-level counterparts.

Since the composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and item loadings were all greater than 0.70, internal consistency was established (Cohen, 1988; Hair et al., 2019). Due to low loading, the first item of WTPPP and the fourth item of both WTPPP and brand preference were omitted. Additionally, since the AVE of all constructs exceeded the 0.50 threshold, therefore, convergent validity was established

TABLE 4 Item loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE

Lower order constructs	Higher order constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	(AVE)
Brand association		BASSO_1	0.802	.861	0.9	0.642
		BASSO_2	0.797			
		BASSO_3	0.817			
		BASSO_4	0.798			
		BASSO_5	0.793			
Brand awareness		BAWARE_1	0.836	.75	0.857	0.667
		BAWARE_2	0.859			
		BAWARE_3	0.751			
Brand image		BIMAGE_1	0.789	.786	0.862	0.609
		BIMAGE_2	0.736			
		BIMAGE_3	0.818			
		BIMAGE_4	0.776			
	Brand equity	Brand association				
		Brand awareness			0.867	0.687
		Brand image				
Brand loyalty		BL_1	0.817	.880	0.909	0.626
		BL_2	0.841			
		BL_3	0.721			
		BL_4	0.770			
		BL_5	0.814			
		BL_6	0.778			
Brand preference		BPREF_1	0.834	.682	0.825	0.612
		BPREF_2	0.682			
		BPREF_3	0.822			
WTPPP		WTPPP_2	0.904	.752	0.889	0.801
		WTPPP_3	0.881			
	Customer response	Brand loyalty	0.946		0.820	0.611
		Brand preference	0.770			
		WTPPP	0.588			
Brand fiability		BTF_1	0.841	.844	0.895	0.681
		BTF_2	0.850			
		BTF_3	0.814			
		BTF_4	0.796	.805	0.873	0.632
Brand intentionality		BTI_1	0.790			
		BTI_2	0.786			
		BTI_3	0.839			
		BTI_4	0.762			
	Brand trust	BTF	0.943		0.937	0.882
		BTI	0.935			
Customization		CUSTOM1	0.892	.714	0.875	0.777
		CUSTOM2	0.871			
Entertainment		ENT1	0.847	.639	0.847	0.735
		ENT2	0.867			
Interaction		INT1	0.743	.679	0.824	0.61
		INT2	0.820			
		INT3	0.778			

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Lower order constructs	Higher order constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	(AVE)
Trendiness		TREND1	0.755	.489	0.794	0.659
		TREND2	0.865			
Word-of-mouth		WOM1	0.892	.652	0.850	0.74
		WOM2	0.827			
	SMMEs	Customization	0.681		0.848	0.528
		Entertainment	0.711			
		Int	0.785			
		Trendiness	0.736			
		Word-of-mouth	0.715			

Note: SMMEs, social media marketing effort; WTPPP, willingness to pay premium price.

TABLE 5 Correlations and AVE

	BA	BL	BP	Basso	BI	BTF	BTI	Cust	Ent	Int	Trend	WoM	WTPPP
BA	**0.801**												
BL	0.424	**0.791**											
BP	0.405	0.581	**0.782**										
BA	0.433	0.672	0.552	**0.643**									
BI	0.576	0.645	0.528	0.617	**0.780**								
BTF	0.481	0.678	0.572	0.625	0.604	**0.825**							
BTI	0.427	0.712	0.587	0.607	0.558	0.764	**0.795**						
Custom	0.349	0.371	0.298	0.349	0.417	0.334	0.356	**0.881**					
Ent	0.404	0.338	0.215	0.368	0.424	0.323	0.329	0.328	**0.857**				
Int	0.369	0.313	0.309	0.362	0.390	0.306	0.296	0.410	0.419	**0.781**			
Trend	0.373	0.361	0.290	0.429	0.446	0.363	0.39	0.409	0.467	0.463	**0.812**		
WoM	0.395	0.476	0.423	0.499	0.512	0.405	0.367	0.361	0.409	0.439	0.398	**0.860**	
WTPPP	0.128	0.421	0.335	0.255	0.197	0.311	0.423	0.192	0.126	0.129	0.220	0.240	**0.895**

Note: Values in bold are the square root of AVE.
Abbreviations: BA, brand awareness; BE, brand equity; BL, brand loyalty; BP, brand preference; BI, brand image; BT, brand trust; BTF, brand fiability; BTI, brand intentionality; Custom, customization; CR, customer response; Ent, entertainment; Int, interaction; Trend, trendiness; WoM, word of mouth; WTPPP, willingness to pay premium price.

(Hair et al., 2019). The reliability and convergent validity of the constructs used in this study are summarized in Table 4.

Discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion. The square root of a construct's AVE should be greater than the correlation between constructs, according to the criterion (shared variance). Table 5 contains the values of AVE (in diagonal) and the correlations between constructs. Since AVE was consistently high across all cases, it established the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Further, we calculated HTMT to further assess the discriminant validity. When the indicator loadings fluctuate within a narrow band, experts recommend calculating the HTMT ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). HTMT is calculated by dividing the average of correlations for all items across all the constructs by the geometric mean of correlation among items measuring the same construct. Henseler et al. (2015) proposed a cut-off value of 0.85 as a point beyond which the

constructs lose their discriminant validity. In the present case, HTMT values were less than the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating a lack of issues concerning discriminant validity (Table 6).

4.3 | Analysis of structural model

The structural model was evaluated based on the amount of variance explained by the constructs (R-Square value). To analyze direct effects, predictive relevance (Q^2 values) and path coefficient significance (*p*-values) were calculated. To assess indirect effects, bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap (BCa) confidence intervals were assessed (Hair et al., 2019). If zero does not fall within the BCa confidence intervals, the effect is considered significant (Preacher et al., 2007). The output of the structural model is depicted in Figure 1 (Table 7).
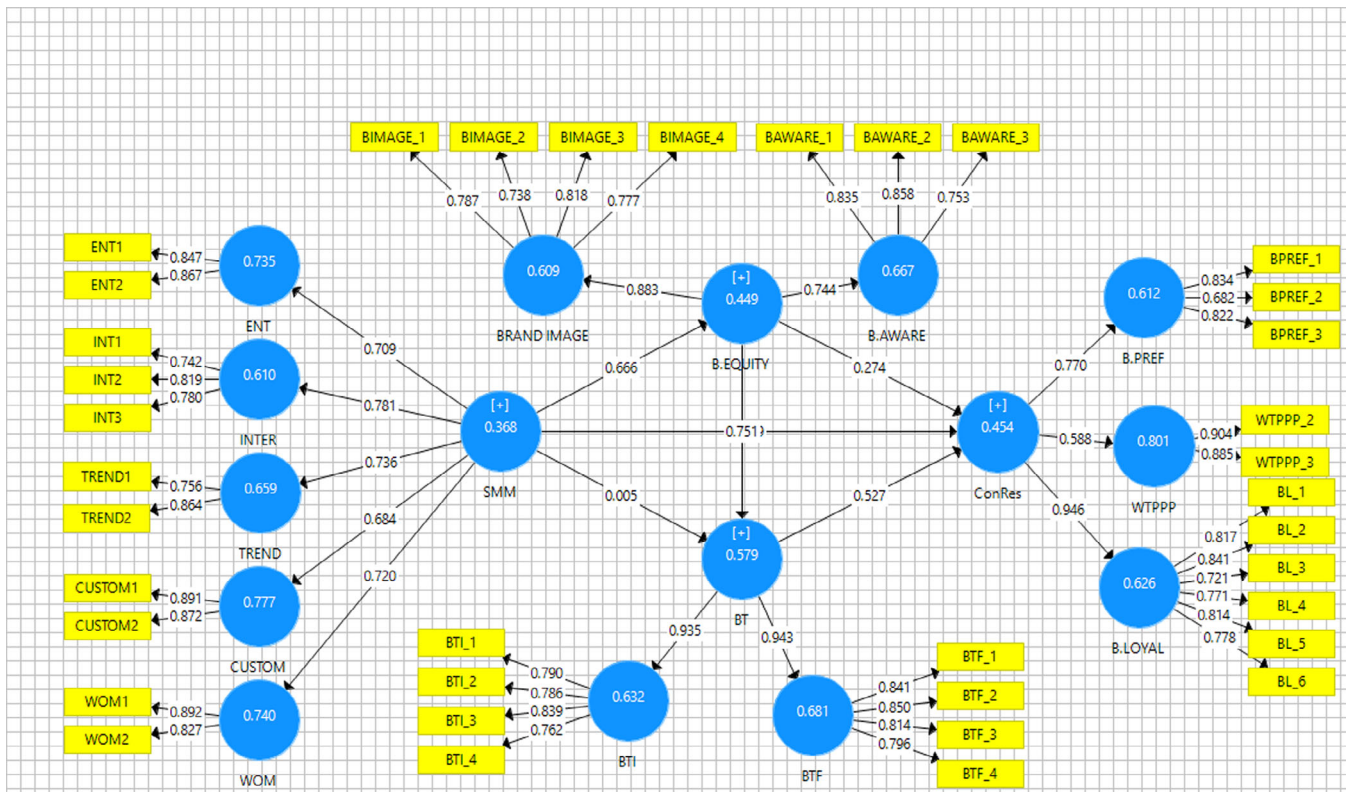
FIGURE 1   Path coefficients and *R*-square [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

The proposed model accounts for 45.4% of the variation in customer responses. Additionally, the majority of the relationships proposed in the model were found to be positive and significant 7. The relationship between SMMEs and brand equity was positive and significant (β = .662; t-value = 15.179; p = .000), thereby supporting H1. However, the relationship between SMMEs and brand trust was not significant (β = .001; t value = 0.023; p = .981), indicating that H2 was not supported. Both brand equity (β = .333; t value = 4.970; p = .000) and brand trust (β = .521; t-value = 8.002; p = .000) demonstrated a positive and significant relationship with customer response, implying support for H4 and H6. The findings of this study are summarized in Table 7.

In the case of indirect relationships, the findings indicate that the effect of SMMEs on brand trust (t = 9.948; BCa = 95%; CI = 0.404 to 0.604) and customer response (t = 4.587; BCa = 95%; CI = 0.127 to 0.315) is indirect, thereby supporting H3 and H5. Whereas in the first case, brand equity fully mediates the effect of SMMEs on brand trust, it only partially mediates SMMEs' effect on customer response in the second. Further, the effect of SMMEs did not converge into customer response through the strengthening of brand trust (t = 0.023; BCa = 95%; CI = −0.052 to 0.062), and thus, did not support H7. Along with directly affecting customer response, brand equity had an indirect effect on customer response via brand trust (t = 7.487; BCa = 95%; CI = 0.294 to 0.503), corroborating H8. It is a case of partial mediation since, despite the mediation, the relationship between brand equity and customer response remained significant.

As a second check, the indirect relationships proposed in H3, H5, and H8 are considered significant since zero did not appear within the upper and lower boundaries of the confidence intervals. (Preacher et al., 2007). Table 8 summarizes these findings.

Hair et al. (2019) recommended the use of the Q^2 approach (Geisser, 1974) due to the lack of *R*-square's out-of-sample predictive power (Dolce et al., 2017). The Q^2 approach is based on the blindfolding procedure and indicates the predictive accuracy of the model. To begin, the blindfolding method eliminates data points from the endogenous constructs in a systematic manner. Then, it predicts the same using the resulting estimates in the absence of such data points. Slight deviations between the original and predicted values result in larger Q^2 values and vice versa. The obtained Q^2 value of 0.397 indicates that the proposed model has an acceptable predictive relevance.

5 | DISCUSSION

Social media has restructured the way traditional marketing mix elements are used to connect with customers. The classic funnel approach has become redundant; instead, the challenge is to be present, at the earliest, at all of the "touchpoints" where consumers are receptive and open to a company's messages (Court et al., 2009). The speed (Qualman, 2013) and spread are crucial to survival and sustainability. Web 2.0 has entwined the entire world in an age of "spread or

TABLE 6 Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio

	BA	BE	BL	BP	BI	BT	BTF	BTI	Cust	CR	Ent	Int	SMME	Trend	WoM	WTPPP
BA																
BE	0.712															
BL	0.515	0.802														
BP	0.579	0.780	0.735													
BI	0.754	0.812	0.770	0.723												
BT	0.583	0.845	0.827	0.789	0.739											
BTF	0.594	0.827	0.778	0.760	0.743	0.772										
BTI	0.544	0.825	0.840	0.782	0.700	0.625	0.921									
Cust	0.475	0.556	0.465	0.424	0.556	0.461	0.431	0.471								
CR	0.535	0.808	0.625	0.792	0.761	0.767	0.808	0.690	0.481							
Ent	0.584	0.625	0.447	0.329	0.596	0.458	0.438	0.458	0.484	0.424						
Int	0.521	0.574	0.398	0.465	0.535	0.411	0.405	0.399	0.586	0.430	0.637					
SMME	0.658	0.772	0.586	0.560	0.736	0.586	0.567	0.578	0.687	0.608	0.674	0.628				
Trend	0.608	0.747	0.543	0.483	0.701	0.602	0.567	0.61	0.676	0.570	0.816	0.793	0.66			
WoM	0.560	0.744	0.617	0.619	0.708	0.543	0.552	0.507	0.519	0.652	0.629	0.649	0.558	0.681		
WTPPP	0.163	0.294	0.520	0.446	0.254	0.476	0.388	0.546	0.264	0.764	0.182	0.180	0.308	0.361	0.336	

Abbreviations: BA, brand awareness; BE, brand equity; BL, brand loyalty; BP, brand preference; BI, brand image; BT, brand trust; BTF, brand fiability; BTI, brand intentionality; Custom, customization; CR, customer response; Ent, entertainment; Inter, interaction; SMME, social media marketing effort; Trend, trendiness; WoM, word of mouth; WTPPP, willingness to pay premium price.

Proposed direct relationships	β-value	t-value	p-values	Decision
H1: SMME→Brand equity	.662	15.179	.000	Supported
H2: SMME→Brand trust	.001	0.023	.981	Not supported
H4: Brand equity→Customer response	.333	4.970	.000	Supported
H6: Brand trust→Customer response	.521	8.002	.000	Supported

TABLE 8 Hypotheses assessment—Indirect relationships

Proposed indirect relationships	t-value	p-value	Confidence intervals BootLLCI 2.50%	BootULCI 97.50%	Result
H3: SMME→brand equity→brand trust	9.948	.000	0.404	0.604	Full mediation
H5: SMME→brand equity→customer response	4.589	.000	0.127	0.315	Partial mediation
H7: SMME→brand trust→customer response	0.023	.982	−0.052	0.062	No mediation
H8: Brand equity→brand trust→customer response	7.487	.000	0.294	0.503	Partial mediation

perish," allowing people to connect in real-time or perish in obscurity. The emergence of enabler platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, among others, presents marketers with a barrage of novel challenges and opportunities. Purchase intentions, identified as a reliable predictor of subsequent behavior (Ajzen, 1985), must be decoded in their new incarnations, such as likes, shares, comments, and emoticons in the age of social media. Given the reach and ability of social media, their potential utility is only limited by a marketer's imagination.

Almost every business now has a social media strategy in place to maximize its potential. Numerous studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of SMMEs in improving business vitals. Especially its effect on brand equity has generated the researchers' interest since it is a source of value for both customers and business organizations (Aaker, 1992). In the business world, because SMMEs contribute to "creating distinctions" (Keller, 2016a, p. 1), they are a valuable marketing resource. In this backdrop, Keller (2016b, p. 14) called for an effective brand management strategy that helps "marketers to have a deep, rich understanding of how consumers and all relevant parties think, feel, and act toward their brands."

The study offers several significant outcomes. To begin, this study establishes the validity of SMME's five-factor structure (Kim & Ko, 2012), which has yielded inconsistent results in previous research (Ebrahim, 2020; Godey et al., 2016). Second, the study indicates that there is a positive effect of SMME on brand equity. Other comparable studies corroborate this conclusion (e.g., Kim & Ko, 2012). Although a few studies have argued that the suggested influence is indirect. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016), for example, argued that SMMEs have an indirect effect on brand equity via brand attitude when it comes to company-created content. However, in the case of user-generated content, SMMEs have a direct as well as an indirect effect, that is, through brand attitude, on brand equity. Similarly, Cheung et al. (2020) contended that SMMEs positively influence brand equity through consumer engagement. In contrast to the current study, which treated SMMEs as a reflective construct, Cheung et al. (2020) conceptualized all five elements as distinct dimensions of SMMEs and regressed each one directly on consumer brand engagement.

Third, the result of the current study suggests that brand equity partially mediates the effect of SMMEs on customer response. Many studies are consistent with the present outcome (e.g., Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015; Seo & Park, 2018). For example, Sanny et al. (2020), in the context of men's skincare, demonstrated that the influence of SMME on consumer response is partially mediated by brand equity in addition to brand trust.

Fourth, contrary to other studies, the current study does not support the popular notion that SMMEs aid in the development of brand trust (e.g., Hajli, 2014; Kamboj et al., 2018; Laroche et al., 2013), which leads to customer response. Rather, the current research indicates that the indirect relationship between SMMEs and customer response via brand trust is insignificant. The current result contradicts previous research (e.g., Ebrahim, 2020; Kamboj et al., 2018). For example, in the field of telecommunications, Ebrahim (2020) discovered that brand trust partially mediated the effect of SMME on brand loyalty. The current result could be explained by the fact that brand trust was regressed on SMME rather than the other way around, as in many other studies (e.g., Dwivedi et al., 2019).

Fifth, this study establishes that brand equity fully mediates the effect of SMMEs on brand trust. This terrain has received less attention in previous research. The current study asserts that SMMEs are inept at directly instilling brand trust in their customers. Instead, it is built through the enhancement of brand equity. Though the current result is consistent with the previous studies (e.g., Laroche et al., 2013), the outcome is contrary to many other studies that argue brand equity is not a mediator; instead, it is the consequence of brand trust built by SMMEs (Ebrahim, 2020).

Finally, the study reveals that brand equity influences customer response directly as well as indirectly through brand trust. The current

findings are consistent with the other studies that argue that brand trust is an outcome of brand equity (e.g., Sürücü et al., 2019). At the same time, numerous studies confirm that brand equity has a positive effect on customer response (e.g., Dwivedi et al., 2019).

5.1 | Theoretical contribution

This is one of the first studies to present a holistic model that encompasses all of the components of SMME (Kim & Ko, 2012), CBBE, and SMME (Keller, 1993). Additionally, it incorporates a breadth of customer responses, including brand loyalty, brand preference, and WTPPP. Earlier research either used brand equity as a summary measure (Godey et al., 2016) or did not incorporate the entire CBBE model (Seo & Park, 2018). Since the proposed model in the study incorporates critical components of brand equity, namely brand awareness and brand image, it provides a holistic view of how SMMEs influence consumer response via brand equity. Second, it contributes by incorporating the role of brand trust, thereby enriching the proposed chain-of-effects model, which incorporates SMMEs, brand equity, and customer response. Our third contribution is to demonstrate how SMMEs can positively influence trust through brand equity. This novel discovery contributes to the expansion of the existing nomological framework. Finally, the study suggests that trust may act as a partial mediator between brand equity and customer responses. The findings further extend the current body of knowledge.

5.2 | Managerial implications

The findings of this study have critical implications for managers. To begin, because the study validates the SMMEs components, managers can assess their SMMEs effort with increased confidence. Second, another critical takeaway for managers is that SMMEs indirectly influence customer response, that is, through the building of brand equity, or by "painting a picture of a brand in the minds and hearts of consumers" (Keller, 2016b, p. 14). As a result, managers should leverage social media to build brand equity, more specifically brand image and awareness. To achieve the same, businesses must compile information about their existing customers' demographic characteristics, activities, and behavior. The collected data can then be used to caliberate an effective Facebook lead generation campaign through the business account.

Additionally, businesses can increase customer engagement by developing campaigns that generate more likes, comments, and shares to help build an image. Creative content should incorporate more photographs, videos, and stories, which are considered to be more effective at image building (Barnhart, 2021). Further, staying current on image-building trends is critical. For instance, in the current pandemic context, inclusivity and purpose-driven campaigns are more effective (Zote, 2021). Organizations must devote additional resources in creating meaningful social media campaigns. Moreover, the study's findings

indicate that SMMEs struggle to establish brand trust on their own. Rather than that, the path is through the development of brand equity. Thus, SMMEs structured to build brand equity accomplish two objectives: first, they elicit a response from customers, and second, they establish customer trust. Brand trust, on the other hand, acts as a mediator between brand equity and customer response. Business organizations should make necessary effort to build brand equity and trust to elicit the desired customer response. While this study focuses exclusively on four smartphone brands in the Indian market. The findings may also apply to other smartphone brands and similar products.

5.3 | Limitations of research and directions for future research

The current study can be expanded in several interesting directions, providing additional insight into how SMMEs can be fine-tuned to achieve desired consumer behavioral outcomes. Muntinga et al. (2011) examined consumers' social media activity. They coined the term "consumer online brand-related activities" (COBRAs), which classifies these activities into three categories: consumption, contribution, and creation. Schivinski et al. (2021) contributed to the body of knowledge by delving into the mechanism by which CBBE results in COBRAs. The current investigation can be expanded by examining the role of brand equity, which is one of the outcomes of SMMEs on COBRAs, namely consumer consumption, contribution, and social media creation (Muntinga et al., 2011). Second, this study's model is primarily based on consumer cognitive processing. It can be augmented by examining how SMMEs can develop emotional connections with brands (Dwivedi et al., 2019), thereby increasing brand equity and consumer response. Third, the construction of CBBE can be linked to the consumer decision journey (Colicev et al., 2018), providing a more complete picture of the interaction between SMMEs, CBBE, and consumer responses. Fourth, extant research indicates that firm-generated and user-generated social media content has varying effects on the development of brand equity (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Accordingly, the current model can be expanded to investigate the effect of user-generated content on outcome variables. Fifth, the proposed model can be expanded by examining the extent to which SMMEs contribute to the creation of social capital, thereby aiding in the development of CBBE (Mathur, 2020). Seventh, future studies can look at the role of SMMEs in increasing consumer engagement, which helps build brand equity and consumer response (Meire et al., 2019). Finally, the current model can be enhanced by incorporating moderators that can help us better understand the nuances of consumer behavior on social media. For example, the value of various types of social media posts, including text, image, music, and video, the amount of time a consumer spends on social media, the distinction between high & low attention (Santoso et al., 2020), and product types (Huang et al., 2020).

The inference from the outcome of the present research should be appreciated in the backdrop of its limitations. First, the present study, being survey-based, at best offers a snapshot view of the state-

of-affairs due to a lack of experimental or longitudinal settings. Second, since data were gathered through a self-report survey, therefore, instances of common method bias cannot be ruled out (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, the study is limited to the smartphone market, which is a high involvement product. The results may vary for other categories of products.

5.4 | Conclusion

The current paper's premise was developed against the backdrop of four goals. The first goal was to determine whether SMMEs influence customer response directly or indirectly through the strengthening of CBBE. According to the findings of the current study, CBBE partially mediates the effect of SMMEs on customer response. Second, the study hypothesized that CBBE would serve as a bridge between SMMEs and brand trust. Brand trust, according to the study's findings, fully mediates the effect of SMMEs and CBBE. The third goal of the study was to see if brand trust could mediate the relationship between SMMEs and customer response. The proposed relationship, according to the study's findings, is not mediated by brand trust. Finally, the research looked into the possibility of brand trust mediating the relationship between CBBE and customer response. The aforementioned mediation, according to the findings, is only partial. In other words, CBBE influences customer response both directly and indirectly through brand trust. The study was a success in terms of eliciting relevant insights that significantly advance the current state of knowledge.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors whose names are listed immediately above certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge, or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Research data are not shared.

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