ACTA SCIENTIAE

ISSN: 2178-7727

DOI: 10.17648/acta.scientiae.6839

INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT & IDENTITY ON BRAND LOYALTY TOWARDS PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS AMONG GEN Z IN KERALA

Dr Deepthi Sankar
Associate Professor, Saintgits Institute of Management, Kottayam

Dr Preetha G Panicker
Assistant Professor (Senior), Saintgits Institute of Management, Kottayam

Mr Sreejith G
Assistant Professor, Saintgits Institute of Management, Kottayam

Mr Alex Robbins
Student
MBA, Saintgits Institute of Management, Kottayam

ABSTRACT

The study on the influence of customer brand engagement & identity on brand loyalty towards personal care products focused on toothpaste among Gen Z. The objective of the study is to analyze the customer brand engagement & identity on brand loyalty towards personal care products focused on toothpaste among Gen Z wherein the relationship between cognitive, affective, behavioural and identity dimensions are studied in relation with brand loyalty mediated by satisfaction. Descriptive statistics was used for the study as research design and the sampling technique used was purposive sampling. A five-point (Likert Scale) questionnaire was used for the data collection. The collected data using questionnaire was also coded into Smart PLS and SPSS, based on the output the factors influencing customer brand engagement & identity on brand loyalty was identified. Results showed that there is a significant influence of customer brand engagement & identity on brand loyalty mediated by satisfaction towards personal care products focused on toothpaste among Gen Z.

Keywords: Customer Brand Engagement, Brand Identity, Brand Loyalty, Personal Care Products, Generation Z

INTRODUCTION

Brand loyalty, the core of brand equity, is a driving force of competitive advantage, as it helps firms develop long-term relationships with consumers. Brand Loyalty is defined as a deeply held commitment

to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior. Loyalty is widely recognized in the literature as a multidimensional construct, encompassing behavioral, attitudinal, or a combination of both aspects. For decades, researchers have emphasized the importance of perceived quality, switching costs, and particularly satisfaction as key factors in brand loyalty. This viewpoint highlights a psychological approach, concentrating on cognitive decision-making processes and less on the sociological aspects of brand loyalty. However, with the evolving role of consumers as co-owners and co-creators of brands, the focus has shifted towards a more relational perspective. This change reflects the understanding that much of a brand's value is derived from external relationships, especially brand–consumer relationships (Keller, 1993). Consequently, contemporary loyalty paradigms now include new concepts, with recent studies identifying additional determinants such as brand trust, brand love, brand experience, and notably, brand engagement since 2014.

Consumer brand engagement (CBEI) is characterized as a consumer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities related to specific brand interactions, reflecting a co-creative identity relationship. This engagement plays a crucial role in fostering experiential relationships with consumers, particularly brand relationships. CBEI represents a deeper, relational level and may serve as a more accurate predictor of loyalty outcomes compared to traditional constructs like quality or satisfaction, which do not fully capture the depth of consumer– brand relationships. While satisfaction is viewed as a transaction-specific, cognitive judgment linked to the expectancy disconfirmation model, engagement encompasses a broader, multidimensional concept with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Consequently, CBEI is increasingly important for brand management, aiding companies in building emotionally loyal customer bases. However, research supporting CBEI's dominant role in loyalty is still limited and primarily exploratory. Moreover, consumers are more likely to feel loyal to brands they feel connected to, attached to, and love, suggesting that consumer–brand relationships can influence BL. Fournier's (1998) influential work underscores the diversity of consumer–brand relationships, which can be categorized based on functional and/or symbolic benefits. Relationships based on utilitarian needs value the brand for its functional role and objective benefits, while emotional considerations emphasize symbolic benefits that fulfill higher-level consumer needs and engage them in meaningful ways.

The brand relationship paradigm has proven effective in understanding BL. It is reasonable to assume that different types of consumer–brand relationships lead to varying levels of CBEI. Although some brands may have limited potential to engage consumers, CBEI is not necessarily confined to high-involvement, emotional categories. Generally, people only form emotional attachments to a few brands, which could include low or moderate involvement brands. However, no quantitative study has yet examined the different nature of consumer– brand relationships and their impact on CBEI. Therefore, the study aims to explore the differences in CBEI based on the functional or emotional nature of consumer–brand relationships and their direct or indirect impact on BL. Additionally, the study seeks to compare CBEI and satisfaction as predictors of BL, considering the two types of consumer– brand relationships defined in this research.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

While brand loyalty has always been important, Gen Z's unique characteristics, being digitally native and highly brand- conscious with distinct purchase behaviors compared to older generations, necessitates a deeper understanding of the factors that drive their loyalty. This project will focus on toothpaste as a specific example within the personal care sector. district serves as a fascinating case study due to its specific cultural and social dynamics that may influence brand loyalty in ways not observed elsewhere in India. Research Questions are:

1. How does a Gen Z consumer's level of engagement with a toothpaste brand impact their ultimate loyalty to that brand?

2 . Does a brand's identity, such as its image and the values it projects, play a role in mediating the connection between engagement and loyalty?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this project is to study the influence of Customer brand engagement & identity on brand loyalty towards personal care products focused on toothpaste among Gen Z

Sub-objectives

The specific goals of this research are:

1. To study the influence of cognitive dimension on brand loyalty towards toothpaste among Gen Z
2. To study the influence of affective dimension on brand loyalty towards toothpaste among Gen Z
3. To study the influence of behavioural dimension on brand loyalty towards toothpaste among Gen Z
4. To study the influence of identity dimension on brand loyalty towards toothpaste among Gen Z

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In their study on understanding the impacts of brand identification and brand experience on customer engagement in the light of energy optimization by Zakaria, Bendahou, Bensassi it was found that connecting customers and brands has been a key focus for both scholars and businesses. Recently, researchers have started looking into how traditional marketing strategies help build these relationships. A new approach has emerged, examining customer engagement through experiences and identification, particularly in energy optimization. This approach shows how companies can use energy-saving initiatives to boost customer engagement, strengthen brand identity, and promote sustainability. The research also highlights differences in how customers develop and stay engaged with industrial brands. Data was collected through interviews, resulting in 16 valid responses. The findings show that different aspects of brand experiences affect customer engagement in the energy optimization sector.

Agnes Helme-Guizon (2019) in the study on consumer brand engagement and its social side on brand- hosted social media: how do they contribute to brand loyalty examined the ways in which social media platforms provide brands with novel avenues to engage with their customer base. The primary focus of this paper is on consumer brand engagement (CBE) within the context of brand-hosted social media platforms, which constitutes the core focus of investigation. It underscores the significance of CBE, defined as consumer-brand interactions involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, as well as brand-based consumer-consumer interactions known as social brand engagement (SBE), in shaping brand loyalty intentions. Through surveys conducted with brand customers on Facebook, the findings reveal that both self-brand connections and SBE contribute to CBE, with the latter being particularly influential in fostering brand loyalty. Furthermore, configurational analysis demonstrates that high levels of brand loyalty can be attained through various combinations of social and CBE, characterized by differing levels of cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement.

HYPOTHESIS

Based on review following hypothesis is formulated

- H01: Cognitive dimension has no significant direct impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).
- H02: Affective dimension has no significant direct impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).
- H03: Behavioural dimension has no significant direct impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).
- H04: Identity dimension has no significant direct impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).
- H05: CBEI (Consumer brand engagement and identity has no significant indirect impact on BL, mediated by Satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to identify the influence of customer brand engagement & identity on brand loyalty towards personal care products focused on toothpaste among Gen Z within Kerala. The research method chosen was descriptive, as it allows for exhaustive investigation and identification of

relationships between various variables. The study used non-probability sampling wherein, the researcher selects the sample based on specific criteria that meet the research objectives. In non-probability sampling, the researcher uses their judgment or convenience to select the sample, rather than giving every member of the population an equal opportunity to be chosen. The sample size for this study is 275 people (GenZ) from Kerala who uses a regular brand of toothpaste daily in their human life. The sample was selected using non-probability sampling technique. A structured online questionnaire consisting of 30 questions and a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) is an effective data collection tool used in this research to collect large amounts of quantitative data. PLS SEM is used for data analysis.**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

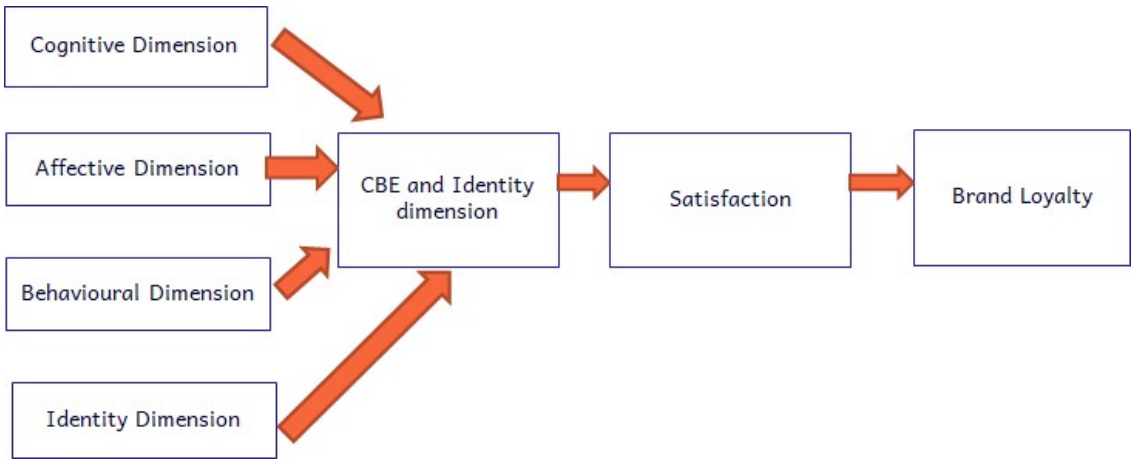

Figure 1: Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

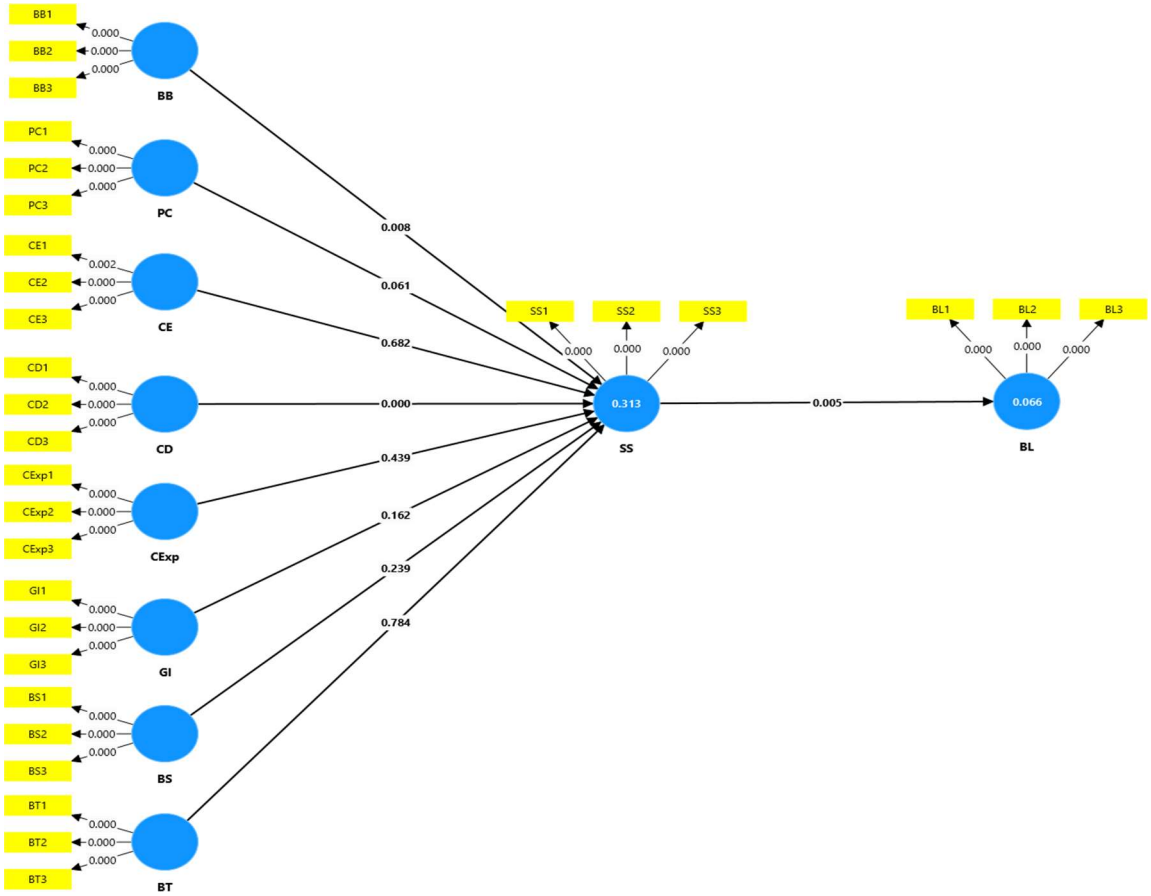

Figure 2: Model

Reliability and Validity (Smart PLS)

Table No 1: Table showing reliability and validity scores (PLS-SEM)

riables	ronbach' s alph	mposite reliabilit o_a)	mposite iability ho_c)	erage varianc racted VE)
and Benefits	0.752	0.826	0.857	0.668
and Loyalty	0.851	1.049	0.902	0.754
and Symbolism	0.76	0.916	0.849	0.654
and Trust	0.89	0.923	0.931	0.817
nsumer Dedication	0.759	0.821	0.859	0.672

nsumer Enthusiasm	0.774	0.809	0.815	0.61
nsumer Experience	0.84	0.874	0.902	0.753
netic Influence	0.913	1.033	0.943	0.846
ce Consciousness	0.916	0.941	0.946	0.855
isfaction	0.805	0.879	0.881	0.712

Cronbach's alpha: Cronbach's alpha serves as an indicator of the internal consistency reliability within a construct or scale, measuring the degree to which its items consistently measure the same underlying concept. The values of Cronbach's alpha range between 0 and 1, with higher scores indicating stronger internal consistency. In the presented table, all constructs demonstrate Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.7, suggesting robust internal consistency reliability. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha values across all constructs in the table fall within the range of 0.752 to 0.916, further affirming their good internal consistency reliability.

Composite reliability (rho_a and rho_c): Composite reliability serves as an additional measure of internal consistency reliability, offering a comparable evaluation of the consistency among items within a construct, akin to Cronbach's alpha. Similar to Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability values range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating stronger reliability. Typically, values exceeding 0.7 are deemed acceptable. Within the provided table, all constructs exhibit composite reliability (rho_a) and composite reliability (rho_c) values falling between 0.830 and 0.879, indicating favorable internal consistency reliability.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE): AVE, or Average Variance Extracted, serves as a gauge of convergent validity, signaling the extent to which items within a construct are interconnected and measuring the same underlying concept. It reflects the average proportion of variance accounted for by the construct in relation to measurement error. AVE values span from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating stronger convergent validity. Typically, AVE values above 0.5 or 0.6 are deemed satisfactory. Within the provided table, all constructs exhibit AVE values falling within the range of 0.61 to 0.855, implying robust convergent validity.

R- Square

Table No 2 : Table showing R-square values

Variables	square	square adjusted
and Loyalty	66	61
atisfaction	13	83

R-square is a statistical metric that signifies the extent to which the variation in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variables in a regression model. It varies between 0 and 1, with higher values denoting a more robust relationship between the factors and the outcome. In simpler terms, it illustrates the effectiveness of the independent variables in forecasting the dependent variable.

F- square

Table No 3 : Table showing F-square values

B -> SS	0.025
S -> SS	0.022
T -> SS	0.001
D -> SS	0.171
E -> SS	0.002
Exp -> SS	0.014
I -> SS	0.009
C -> SS	0.037
S -> BL	0.077

The f-square value presented in this table serves as a gauge of effect size, depicting the magnitude of the relationship between the variables. It signifies the proportion of variation in one variable that can be elucidated by another variable. Ranging from 0 to 1, a higher f- square value indicates a more pronounced relationship between the variables.

Discriminant Validity

Table No.4 : Table showing Fornell-Larcker criterion

riables	**and nefits**	**and yalty**	**and mbolism**	**and ust**	**nsumer dication**	**nsumer thusiasm**	**nsumer perience**	**netic fluence**	**ice nsciousness**	**tisfaction**
and nefits	0.73									
and yalty	0.35	4								
and mbolism	0.45	4	4							
and ust	0.58	9	2	0.86						

nsumer dication	0.51	2	8	0.29	3					
nsumer thusiasm	0.51	0	2	0.2	1	0				
stomer perience	0.38	7	7	0.59	1	2	0			
netic luence	0.17	3	3	0.31	4	8	5	0		
ce nsciousness	0.247	7	3	0.21	6	4	7	1	8	
isfaction	0.47	6	3	0.26	6	55	8	0	0	7

Discriminant validity is a statistical concept used to assess whether different constructs or variables in a research study are distinct from each other. It ensures that the measures used to assess these constructs are truly capturing separate underlying concepts rather than overlapping or redundant ones. The Fornell-Larcker criterion is a specific method to evaluate discriminant validity in a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. It involves examining the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct, which should be greater than the correlations between the construct and other constructs in the model. If this criterion is met, it suggests that the constructs have good discriminant validity.

Final Results

Table No.5 : Table showing path coefficients

mension	**Original ample (O**	**mple mean (M**	**ndard deviati TDEV)**	**T statistics (|O/STDEV|)**	**P values**
gnitive Dimension -> and Loyalty	0.024	0.023	0.055	0.446	0.003
ntity Dimension -> and Loyalty	0.251	0.244	0.074	3.383	0.001
fective Dimension -> and Loyalty	0.239	0.229	0.095	2.523	0.012
havioral Dimension-> and Loyalty	0.363	0.355	0.05	7.211	0.02
isfaction - > Brand	0.257	0.272	0.272	2.826	0.005

yalty					

Standard Estimate: The standard estimate tells us how strong the relationship is between two variables. Higher values mean that the relationship between the variables is stronger. For example, if the standard estimate is 0.5, it indicates a stronger relationship than if it were 0.2.

Sample mean (M): The sample mean is the average value of the observations we have collected for a particular variable. It gives us an idea of what the typical value is within our data. For instance, if we have collected data on people's ages, the sample mean would give us the average age of the people in our sample.

Standard deviation (STDEV): The standard deviation tells us how spread out or varied the observations are around the average (sample mean). A higher standard deviation means that the observations are more spread out from the average. It shows us the degree of variability in our data. For example, if we are measuring the heights of trees in a forest, a higher standard deviation would mean that the heights of the trees vary more.

T statistics (|O/STDEV|): The T statistic helps us understand the strength of the relationship between variables. It compares the estimated effect size (standard estimate) to the amount of variability in our data (standard deviation). A higher T statistic value means that the relationship between the variables is stronger. It gives us an indication of how much confidence we can have in the relationship we observe.

P values: P values tell us if the relationship between variables is statistically significant, meaning it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. A lower P value suggests a more reliable and significant relationship. Typically, if the P value is below a certain threshold (e.g., 0.05),

the relationship is considered to be statistically significant. It means that there is strong evidence supporting the existence of a relationship between the variables we are studying.

Hypothesis 1: Cognitive dimension has a significant direct impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

The estimated effect size is 0.024, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.055, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 0.446, indicating a moderate relationship. The P value is 0.003, suggesting a highly significant relationship.

Hypothesis 2: Affective dimension has a significant direct impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

The estimated effect size is 0.239, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.095, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 2.523, indicating a strong relationship. The P value is 0.012, suggesting a highly significant relationship.

Hypothesis 3: Behavioural dimension has a significant direct impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

The estimated effect size is 0.363, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.05, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 7.211, indicating a strong relationship. The P value is 0.02, suggesting a highly significant relationship.

Hypothesis 4: Identity dimension has a significant direct impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

The estimated effect size is 0.251, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.074, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 3.383, indicating a strong relationship. The P value is 0.015, suggesting a highly significant relationship.

Hypothesis 5: CBEI has a significant indirect impact on Brand Loyalty (BL), mediated by Satisfaction

The estimated effect size is 0.257, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.272, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 2.826, indicating a strong relationship. The P value is 0.005, suggesting a highly significant relationship.

Structural Model

After obtaining satisfactory findings from the initial assessment, Smart PLS 4.0 was employed to test the hypotheses and evaluate the goodness of fit (GoF) of the data. This phase involved analyzing the hypotheses outlined in the research model section. Utilizing a bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples and setting a significance threshold of 0.05 for the path coefficient, t-value, and p-value, the acceptance criteria were established. Specifically, meeting the acceptance criteria required the path coefficient to be equal to or greater than 0.10, the t-value to be equal to or greater than 1.96, and the p-value to be less than or equal to 0.05. Consequently, the data suggests that hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 have been validated.

Table No 6 : Table showing results of the structural model

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t - value	p - value	Decision

	Cognitive Dimension -> Brand Loyalty	0.024	0.446	0.003	Supported
	Affective Dimension Brand Loyalty	0.239	2.523	0.012	Supported
	Behavioural Dimension -> Brand Loyalty	0.363	7.211	0.02	Supported
	Identity Dimension -> Brand Loyalty	0.251	3.383	0.001	Supported
	Satisfaction- > Brand Loyalty	0.257	2.826	0.005	Supported

Inference: The table displays the findings of a structural model that examined how brand anthropomorphism affected impulsive purchasing. Five hypotheses (H1–H5) that examined the connections between brand personification, design, anthropomorphism, advertisement, and product qualities were the main and the core focus of the analysis that has been carried out.

Out of the five hypotheses, all five gets substantial support from the data (H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5). Cognitive Dimension and brand loyalty (H1), affective dimension and brand loyalty (H2), behavioural dimension and brand loyalty (H3), identity dimension and brand loyalty (H4) and satisfaction and brand loyalty (H5) all have a strong positive correlation.

Findings about Hypothesis Testing

1. The path from cognitive dimension to Brand Loyalty has the estimated effect size is 0.024, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.055, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 0.446, indicating a moderate relationship. The P value is 0.003, suggesting a highly significant relationship.
2. The path from affective dimension to Brand Loyalty has the estimated effect size is 0.239, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.095, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 2.523, indicating a strong relationship. The P value

is 0.012, suggesting a highly significant relationship.

3. The path from behavioural dimension to Brand Loyalty has the estimated effect size is 0.363, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.05, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 7.211, indicating a strong relationship. The P value is 0.02, suggesting a highly significant relationship.
4. The path from identity dimension to Brand Loyalty has the estimated effect size is 0.251, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.074, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 3.383, indicating a strong relationship. The P value is 0.015, suggesting a highly significant relationship.
5. The path from satisfaction to Brand Loyalty has the estimated effect size is 0.257, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The sample mean and the estimated effect size are similar, suggesting that the sample accurately represents the population. The standard deviation is 0.272, indicating relatively low variability in the data. The T statistic is 2.826, indicating a strong relationship. The P value is 0.005, suggesting a highly significant relationship.

CONCLUSION

This study examined influence of customer brand engagement & identity on brand loyalty towards personal care products (toothpaste) among Gen Z within Kerala. The findings suggest that a significant portion of the respondents respond positively to cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. Behavioural dimension does not have much significance on satisfaction and brand loyalty among customers. Brand benefits and brand trust were found to have a strong positive influence on satisfaction, which has a positive effect on brand loyalty. This suggests that focusing on emotional connection alongside perceived quality can be effective. This understanding equips toothpaste brands with actionable knowledge. By tailoring their marketing strategies and product offerings to resonate with Gen Z's preferences, brands can build stronger and more meaningful connections within this crucial demographic. The findings from this study not only provide valuable insights for Gen Z and toothpaste brands in , but they also contribute to the broader conversation about brand loyalty within the personal care industry. As consumer preferences continue to shift, this research paves the way for future studies that can illuminate the ever-changing landscape of brand loyalty.

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