

## SCENT-SATIONAL STRATEGIES: BOOSTING REFILL PERFUME BRAND IMAGE THROUGH PRODUCT, PRICE, SERVICE, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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**ABSTRACT:** Brand image remains pivotal in contemporary marketing discourse, particularly within niche industries. This study advances brand theory by empirically examining how product attributes, pricing strategies, service quality, and social media engagement collectively shape the brand image of refill perfumes through customer experience mediation. Employing Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) via SmartPLS, data from 332 refill perfume customers across five cities in West Java, Indonesia were analyzed using cluster sampling. Findings indicate that all examined factors significantly enhance brand image, with customer experience acting as a crucial mediator. Practically, this suggests that refill perfume businesses can strategically leverage product quality, competitive pricing, superior service, and dynamic social media presence to cultivate an extended brand identity.

**Keywords:** Product, Price, Service Quality, Social Media, Customer Experience

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## INTRODUCTION

Brand image has long been a critical concern in both theoretical and empirical marketing research. Theoretically, brand image serves as a valuable mechanism for fulfilling consumers' self-definition needs (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Fournier, 1998). Its symbolic nature (McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999) enables individuals to identify with brands, thereby endowing their personal identity with meaning and differentiating themselves from relevant social groups (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Empirically, numerous marketing studies have established brand image as central to fostering positive impressions among consumers. A strong brand enhances trust, particularly for intangible products, by making them more comprehensible and relatable (Berry, 2000).

In Indonesia, refill perfumes have become increasingly popular due to their affordability and resemblance to premium fragrance brands. The refill perfume industry, which emerged more than five decades ago, continues to thrive as it meets the demands of a cost-conscious market. However, despite their accessibility and economic value, refill perfumes often suffer from a fragile brand image. This vulnerability stems from concerns regarding product safety and inconsistent quality, which have contributed to consumer skepticism and brand devaluation.

Brand image is shaped by several critical factors, including quality, trustworthiness, usefulness, service, risk, price, and the broader brand identity (Coaker, 2021; Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, & Hansen, 2019; Simonson & Schmitt, 2009; Tharpe, 2014). In this study, five variables—product, price, service quality, social media, and customer experience—are examined, with customer experience positioned as an intervening variable. The rationale for these choices is well-supported: product quality reflects the brand's functional promise (Kotler & Armstrong, 2019); pricing influences consumer value perceptions (Purwandani & Widodo, 2022; Wardana, 2017); social media fosters engagement and co-creation of brand meaning (Kelly, Kerr, & Drennan, 2010); service quality reflects operational consistency and consumer trust (Tjiptono, 2017; Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2016); and customer experience, as Meyer and Schwager (2007) define, synthesizes all touchpoints into a coherent brand impression.

In the context of West Java's evolving refill perfume industry, this study extends the conversation on brand image beyond mainstream consumer markets. While much of the branding literature has centered on high-end or established products, the dynamics within value-driven sectors remain insufficiently mapped. By proposing an integrated model that brings together product, price, service, and digital interaction—mediated by the emotional and experiential dimensions of customer experience—this study offers both theoretical refinement and practical insight. It contributes to the broader discourse on experiential branding and consumer perception in price-sensitive markets, while also guiding practitioners on how to craft resilient brand identities in industries often overlooked by conventional branding strategies.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

### *Brand Image*

In the perfume industry, brand image is critical in shaping consumer perceptions, preferences, and emotional connections. Given that perfume is not merely a utilitarian product but one imbued with high symbolic value, its brand image conveys much more than scent quality. It reflects identity, social aspiration, and the lifestyle narratives that consumers wish to embrace. In an intensely competitive and image-driven market, brands that project exclusivity, elegance, and authenticity tend to command consumer attention and foster loyalty. Brand image encompasses all associations individuals form with a brand—be it functional, symbolic, or emotional (Newman, 1957; Martineau, 1959; Bastos & Levy, 2012; Lee, James, & Kim, 2014; Zhang, 2015; Westre, 2016). According to Coaker (2021), the core determinants of brand image include quality, trustworthiness, usefulness, service, risk, price, and the brand's intrinsic visual and symbolic identity.

### *Product*

In the context of perfumes, the product represents far more than a functional item that delivers fragrance—it becomes an extension of self-image, mood, and lifestyle. It serves as a symbolic good that communicates personal values and social status. As such, in marketing management, product is not only a basic offering but a strategic vehicle of brand meaning. It plays a central role in both attraction and retention strategies (Pride & Ferrell, 2019; Kotler & Armstrong, 2019; Lancaster & Massingham, 2019; Brassington & Pettitt, 2017). The alignment of product quality with consumer expectations is essential for forming a compelling customer experience, especially in markets where branding and sensorial appeal intersect.

*H1: Product has a positive effect on customer experience with refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

#### *Price*

Price is a decisive element of the marketing mix that influences consumer expectations and perceptions of value, especially in the refill perfume sector, where affordability is a key selling point. In price-sensitive markets, consumers often use price as a heuristic for assessing quality, fairness, and credibility. Purwandani and Widodo (2022) affirm that price reflects the value perceived by consumers in relation to the benefit received. Additionally, price plays a dual function—both as a financial sacrifice and a symbolic signal (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016; Nurhalimah et al., 2018; Akdogan, 2021; Al-Salamini et al., 2015). When carefully calibrated, pricing strategies can enhance consumer satisfaction and deepen brand association.

*H2: Price has a positive effect on customer experience with refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

#### *Service Quality*

Service quality is the customer's evaluation of the performance delivered by the firm in relation to their expectations. In the perfume retail experience—particularly for refill models where direct interactions often occur—service quality becomes a critical touchpoint. It reflects the consistency, responsiveness, and professionalism of service personnel and operational systems. Foundational work by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), as well as subsequent studies (Asubonteng, McCleary, & Swan, 1996; Rust & Oliver, 1994; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009), has long positioned service quality as a driver of satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Tjiptono (2017) emphasizes its role in brand differentiation, while Hapsari, Clemes, and Dean (2016) affirm its direct influence on customer evaluations and emotional attachment.

*H3: Service quality has a positive effect on customer experience with refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

#### *Social Media*

Social media has evolved into a critical platform for brand storytelling and relational engagement. In the perfume industry—where aesthetic, narrative, and sensory imagery are key—social media enables brands to co-create meaning with consumers in real time. It allows consumers to not only follow but interact with, contribute to, and amplify brand messages. Boyd and Ellison (2007) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as digital ecosystems for identity construction and peer-based engagement. Nasrullah (2015) adds that these platforms create virtual spaces where consumers form perceptions through reviews, visual campaigns, and community sentiment. Thus, social media serves as both a communicative and experiential vehicle that contributes to how customers evaluate and remember a brand.

*H4: Social media has a positive effect on customer experience with refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

#### *Customer Experience*

Customer experience stands at the intersection of rational evaluation and emotional engagement, encompassing the entirety of a consumer's interactions with a brand across physical and digital touchpoints. It is more than the sum of transactional exchanges—it reflects how consumers feel, think, and respond before, during, and after purchase (Meyer & Schwager,

2007). A positive customer experience integrates sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses, thereby elevating brand perception and deepening consumer loyalty (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007). Chen and Lien (2014) assert that customer experience activates intrinsic motivation, leading to more meaningful brand relationships. Moreover, as Paisri, Ruanguttamanun, and Sujchaphong (2020) explain, in low-involvement markets such as refill perfumes, where price and accessibility may dominate, customer experience serves as a crucial differentiator. It mediates the gap between consumer expectation and brand promise, translating functional benefits into memorable brand encounters.

As such, treating customer experience not is not merely as a consequence but as a mediator of brand-building variables such as product, price, service, and digital engagement. This study positions it as the keystone in understanding how value perception transforms into brand affinity. In today's market, especially for fast-moving and semi-luxury consumer goods like refill perfumes, crafting a consistent and emotionally resonant customer experience can become the most sustainable source of differentiation.

*H5: Customer experience has a positive effect on the brand image of refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

*H6: Customer experience mediates the effect of price on the brand image of refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

*H7: Customer experience mediates the effect of product on the brand image of refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

*H8: Customer experience mediates the effect of service quality on the brand image of refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

*H9: Customer experience mediates the effect of social media on the brand image of refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia.*

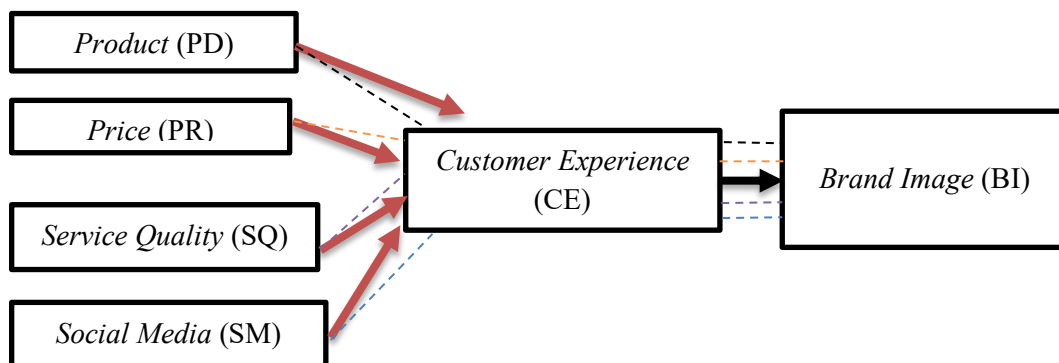


Figure 1. Research Model

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design that combines both descriptive and verificative approaches. The descriptive element explores how consumers perceive key brand-related factors in the refill perfume industry, while the verificative element tests a set of hypotheses concerning the influence of product, price, service quality, and social media on brand image—both directly and through customer experience. To analyze these relationships, the study employs Structural Equation Modeling using Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), a method particularly suitable for examining complex models with multiple constructs and mediation paths.

The research focuses on refill perfume consumers in five major cities of West Java, Indonesia: Bandung, Tasikmalaya, Garut, Bekasi, and Cirebon. The broader context includes 332 refill perfume stores, representing 216 refill perfume brands actively operating in the region. Using simple random sampling, 332 consumers were selected to participate in the survey, allowing each respondent an equal chance of inclusion and providing a diverse view of consumer experiences across urban settings.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed from established scales in previous studies. Measurement items for product, price, service quality, and social media were adapted from prior marketing and branding literature (e.g., Kotler & Armstrong, 2016; Tjiptono, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). To capture the nuances of customer experience, this study drew

on frameworks by Meyer and Schwager (2007) and Gentile et al. (2007), while brand image indicators followed models used by Zhang (2015) and Coaker (2021). All constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to reflect respondents' attitudes and evaluations.

The data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4, which allowed the research to examine both how well the measurement items reflected their intended constructs, and how the constructs themselves were related. This approach helped uncover the strength and direction of the proposed relationships while taking into account the role of customer experience as a mediator. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for business owners and marketers in the refill perfume industry, particularly in understanding what drives brand image in markets where affordability, personalization, and consumer interaction play significant roles.

## RESULTS

### *Descriptive Research Findings*

Table 1 provides an overview of the key dimensions used to assess brand image within the studied context. It outlines the framework by which each dimension is evaluated, incorporating metrics such as score, proportional contribution, and level of achievement.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Brand Image Variables

No	Dimension	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Recognition	5610	29.69%	80.46%
2	Reputation	5723	30.29%	82.09%
3	Affinity	3797	20.10%	81.69%
4	Marketing & Communication	3764	19.92%	80.98%
	Total	18894	100%	81.31%

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the reputation dimension has the highest contribution and achievement value, consistent with previous research. In this study, brand image has a total score of 18.894 out of an ideal score of 23.240 for 10 statements, with a percentage achievement of 81.31%. Table 2 outlines the structure of product-related variables used to evaluate performance in terms of quality, design, and functional aspects.

Table 2. Scale Assessment for Product

No	Dimension	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Quality of Work	5693	15.80%	81.66%
2	Has Long Durability	3843	10.67%	82.68%
3	Product Customization	5825	16.17%	83.55%
4	Style	3833	10.64%	82.47%
5	Volume Capacity	5850	16.24%	83.91%
6	Bottle Dimension	5626	15.62%	80.69%
7	Branding & Labeling	5358	14.87%	76.85%
	Total	36028	100%	83,91%

It is evident that the volume capacity dimension has the highest contribution and achievement value, consistent with previous research. Next, the scale of price is in Table 3.

Table 3. Price Scalability

No	Dimension	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Price Match with Product Quality	3886	18.33%	83.61%
2	Affordability	5912	27.88%	84.80%
3	Price Competitiveness	5587	26.35%	80.13%
4	Price Match with Benefits	5820	27.45%	83.48%
	Total	21205	100%	100%

Affordability emerges as the highest contributor from the achievement score, hence this issue warrants further managerial attention in application. Table 4 provides the information of service quality for further description.

Table 4. Recapitulation of Service Quality Variables

No	Dimension	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Tangibles	5631	21.35%	80.77%
2	Assurance	3879	14.70%	83.46%
3	Responsiveness	5691	21.57%	81.63%
4	Service Reliability	5651	21.42%	81.05%
	Total	26380	100%	100%

The assurance came as the highest contribution and achievement value, consistent with previous research. In this study, service quality has a total score of 26.380 out of an ideal score of 32.536 for 14 statements, with a percentage achievement of 81.63%. Social media information will be provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Social Media Information

No	Dimension	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Content Creation	5646	20.41%	80.98%
2	Content Sharing	5404	19.53%	77.51%
3	Influencer Partnership	5562	20.10%	79.78%
4	Community Building	3743	13.53%	80.53%
5	Hashtag Campaigns	3603	13%	77.52%
6	Paid Advertising	3709	20.41%	80.98%
	Total	27667	100%	19.53%

Based on Table 5, it can be seen that the content creation dimension has the highest contribution and achievement value, consistent with previous research. In this study, social media has a total score of 27.667 out of an ideal score of 34.860 for 15 statements, with a percentage achievement of 79.37%. Table 6 will provide information for the customer experience.

Table 6. Customer Experience Revelations

No	Dimension	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Cognitive	5885	14.73%	84.41%
2	Content Sharing	3855	9.65%	82.94%
3	Physical	1894	4.74%	81.50%
4	Sensory	5598	14.01%	80.29%
5	Product Quality	3878	9.70%	83.43%
6	Service Quality	3750	9.38%	80.68%
7	Scent Personalization	3940	9.86%	84.77%
8	Customer Support & Education	3615	9.05%	77.78%
9	Refill Mechanism	3828	9.58%	82.36%
10	Online Experience	3722	9.31%	80.08%
	Total	39965	100%	81.89%

It is evident that the cognitive dimension has the highest contribution and achievement value. They pave the representation of managerial policy for analysis.

### *Inferential Statistics*

Assessment of the measurement model begins with an evaluation of convergent validity, using factor loadings to determine how well each indicator reflects its underlying construct. This is followed by tests of internal consistency through Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha, both commonly applied in structural equation modeling to ensure the reliability of latent variables.

These steps establish the foundation for confirming the robustness of the measurement model before proceeding to structural analysis as in Table 8.

Table 8. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Brand Image	0,937	0,946
Customer Experience	0,954	0,958
Price	0,936	0,945
Product	0,934	0,942
Service Quality	0,941	0,949
Social Media	0,945	0,951

All laten variables in this study can be considered reliable, and the constructed model has a good level of reliability, as shown by the test results presented in Table 8. This result presents as the precursor of the convergent validity tests as in Appendix 1. Table 9 presents the structural model outcomes, summarizing both the direct and mediating effects among the study's key constructs. The analysis incorporates path coefficients, t-values, and p-values to evaluate the strength and significance of hypothesized relationships. This model testing phase serves to verify whether the proposed theoretical linkages hold empirical support within the observed data. Each hypothesis is assessed based on statistical criteria, allowing for informed conclusions regarding the dynamics of customer experience and brand image formation (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 9. Output Path Coefficient

Paths	Effect	t-value	p-value	Decision
Product -> Customer experience	0.121	2.540	0.011	H1 Accepted
Price -> Customer experience	0.278	5.332	0.000	H2 Accepted
Social media -> Customer experience	0.165	3.968	0.000	H3 Accepted
Service quality -> Customer experience	0.430	8.467	0.000	H4 Accepted
Customer experience -> Brand image	0.440	7.486	0.000	H5 Accepted
Product -> Cust. Experience -> Brand image	0.053	2.383	0.017	H6 Accepted
Price -> Customer experience -> Brand image	0.122	4.188	0.000	H7 Accepted
Social media -> Customer experience -> WOM	0.054	2.909	0.004	H8 Accepted
Servqual -> Cust. Exp-> WOM -> Brand image	0.067	3.904	0.000	H9 Accepted

The results in Table 3 confirm that all proposed hypotheses are supported, with each path demonstrating statistically significant effects. Service quality emerges as the most influential factor on customer experience, followed by price, social media, and product attributes. Furthermore, customer experience shows a strong direct effect on brand image, reinforcing its mediating role in the model. The mediation analyses also reveal that customer experience significantly transmits the effects of product, price, and social media to brand image, while a sequential mediation through customer experience and word of mouth underscores the extended influence of service quality. These findings highlight the central role of customer experience as both a direct driver and a conduit for enhancing brand perception.

## DISCUSSION

The empirical analysis confirms that product quality exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on customer experience in the context of refill perfume in West Java, Indonesia. This relationship, as validated through the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ), underscores the role of product attributes in shaping experiential outcomes—a notion well-supported by Aliff et al. (2018) and Nasution (2004), who emphasize that superior product performance tends to foster favorable customer experiences, enhance satisfaction, and contribute to brand loyalty.

Similarly, the price variable reveals a significant and positive influence on customer experience, substantiating the hypothesis that competitive pricing strategies are instrumental in shaping consumer perceptions and interactions. This corroborates prior insights from Razak et

al. (2016), Malik et al. (2012), and Eshasi (2015), who collectively assert that equitable pricing enhances value perception and contributes to enriched customer experiences.

The study also affirms that service quality significantly enhances customer experience in the refill perfume sector. This finding lends further weight to the growing consensus that seamless service delivery, particularly across multi-channel platforms, shapes how consumers internalize brand interactions. Ammarussalam and Astuti (2024), along with Natarajan and Raghavan (2023), argue that familiarity with service processes enhances perceived value and fosters favorable experiential judgments.

Moreover, social media emerges as a potent driver of customer experience, with the data indicating a positive and statistically significant effect. As such, the hypothesis is accepted, and the finding is in alignment with the theoretical perspectives of Bate and Balawi (2022) and Ayoub and Balawi (2023), who underscore the strategic deployment of social media platforms to engage consumers and amplify experiential value through interactive and personalized content streams. Beyond antecedents, the study substantiates the influence of customer experience on brand image, with the t-statistic affirming both significance and directionality. Accordingly,  $H_4$  is accepted, reinforcing the proposition that customer experience plays a central role in shaping brand perception. This mirrors the findings of Rahayu and Lestari (2021), who highlight the experiential underpinnings of brand image formation, noting the relevance of emotional resonance, service encounters, and consumer narratives in shaping reputation.

In terms of mediation, customer experience is shown to bridge the relationship between product quality and brand image. That is, positive experiences with the product amplify consumers' perception of the brand, indicating a mediating pathway through which product attributes translate into brand equity. Similarly, customer experience mediates the effect of price on brand image. The significance of this indirect relationship implies that consumers' interpretations of value—especially when prices are perceived as fair or advantageous—materially influence their broader evaluation of the brand. Service quality's impact on brand image is likewise mediated by customer experience, reinforcing the assertions of Zahra, Listyorini, and Wijayanto (2023), who contend that both direct and mediated effects are instrumental in influencing brand outcomes across service-intensive sectors.

Finally, social media's influence on brand image is also mediated by customer experience. Engagement through social platforms shapes consumers' experiential journeys, which in turn informs their perception of the brand. This underscores the interdependence of digital communication strategies and experiential value creation in shaping contemporary brand narratives.

## **CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY**

This study highlights the crucial role of customer experience in mediating the relationship between product, price, service quality, and social media with brand image in the refill perfume industry of West Java. The findings affirm that enhancing customer experience is not merely a tactical advantage but a strategic imperative. Service quality emerged as a dominant factor, supported by the influences of fair pricing, appealing products, and interactive social media engagement. Customer experience, in turn, significantly shaped brand image, serving as a bridge that translates operational efforts into brand meaning and market perception.

While the study provides valuable insights, it also opens pathways for future research. Broader geographic coverage and exploration of demographic differences could offer richer perspectives. A more layered approach to customer experience—distinguishing emotional, cognitive, and sensory dimensions—would also deepen understanding. Further, integrating longitudinal designs may help capture how these relationships shift over time. As refill perfume businesses navigate a competitive landscape, investing in authentic, memorable customer experiences remains essential for building enduring brand value.

## **ETHICAL DISCLOSURE**

All participants provided written informed consent before participation. They were informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses.



## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix 1. Convergent Validity				
Variable	Dimension	Code	LF	AVE
Customer Experience (CE)	Cognitive	CE1	0,756	0,524
		CE2	0,772	
		CE3	0,720	
	Content Sharing	CE4	0,749	
		CE6	0,727	
	Physical	CE9	0,730	
		CE10	0,751	
	Product Quality	CE11	0,727	
		CE12	0,743	
	Service Quality	CE13	0,746	
		CE14	0,720	
	Scent Personalization	CE15	0,717	
		CE16	0,778	
	Customer Support & Education	CE19	0,788	
		CE21	0,716	
Brand Image (BI)	Online Experience	BI1	0,821	0,640
		BI2	0,797	
	Recognition	BI4	0,823	
		BI5	0,817	
	Reputation	BI6	0,847	
		BI7	0,792	
	Afinity	BI8	0,854	
		BI9	0,803	
	Marketing & Communication	BI10	0,776	
		PD1	0,708	
Product (PD)	Quality of Work	PD2	0,720	0,505
		PD4	0,735	
	Has Long Durability	PD5	0,776	
		PD7	0,720	
	Product Customization	PD10	0,758	
		PD14	0,715	
	Volume Capacity	PD15	0,704	
		PD16	0,726	
	Bottle Dimension	PD20	0,724	
		PR1	0,780	
Price (PR)	Branding & Labeling	PR2	0,819	0,570
		PR3	0,776	
	Price conforms Product Quality	PR4	0,772	
		PR5	0,806	
	Affordability	PR7	0,757	
		PR8	0,786	
	Price Competitiveness	PR9	0,794	
		PR10	0,816	
	Price Match with Benefits	PR11	0,805	
		SM1	0,793	
Social Media (SM)	Content Creation	SM2	0,755	0,580
		SM3	0,734	
	Content Sharing	SM5	0,745	
		SM7	0,720	
	Influencer Partnership	SM8	0,743	
		SM9	0,763	
	Community Building	SM10	0,808	
		SM11	0,770	

Service Quality	Hastag Campaigns	SM12	0,807	0,564
		SM13	0,761	
	Paid Advertising	SM14	0,777	
		SM15	0,747	
	Tangibles	SQ1	0,713	
		SQ2	0,792	
	Assurance	SQ4	0,734	
		SQ5	0,766	
	Responsiveness	SQ6	0,821	
		SQ7	0,803	
	Service Reliability	SQ8	0,774	
		SQ9	0,808	
		SQ10	0,731	
		SQ11	0,722	
	Empathy	SQ12	0,792	
		SQ14	0,792	