

THE EFFECT OF NEURO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP, DECISION- MAKING HEURISTICS, SOCIAL MEDIA VIRALITY, AND COMMUNITY-BASED MARKETING ON FOOD PRODUCT BRAND EQUITY

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Abstract. This study investigates the effect of neuro-entrepreneurship, decision-making heuristics, social media virality, and community-based marketing on the brand equity of food products. Employing a quantitative approach with 350 respondents, the study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the relationships among variables. The results reveal that all four factors significantly and positively influence brand equity, with community-based marketing having the strongest impact. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating cognitive, behavioral, digital, and social strategies to build strong food brands. This research contributes to both academic theory and practical marketing by providing a multidimensional understanding of brand equity formation in the evolving food market. Recommendations for entrepreneurs include leveraging neurological insights, simplifying consumer decision processes, harnessing social media virality, and fostering community engagement.

Keywords: neuro-entrepreneurship, decision-making heuristics, social media virality, community-based marketing, brand equity

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh neuro-entrepreneurship, heuristik pengambilan keputusan, viralitas media sosial, dan pemasaran berbasis komunitas terhadap ekuitas merek produk makanan. Dengan pendekatan kuantitatif dan melibatkan 350 responden, analisis menggunakan structural equation modeling (SEM) untuk menguji hubungan antar variabel. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa keempat faktor tersebut berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap ekuitas merek, dengan pemasaran berbasis komunitas sebagai faktor paling dominan. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya integrasi strategi kognitif, perilaku, digital, dan sosial dalam membangun merek produk makanan yang kuat. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis dan praktis dengan memberikan pemahaman multidimensi tentang pembentukan ekuitas merek di pasar makanan yang terus berkembang. Rekomendasi bagi pelaku usaha adalah memanfaatkan wawasan neurologis, menyederhanakan proses pengambilan keputusan konsumen, memaksimalkan viralitas media sosial, dan memperkuat keterlibatan komunitas.

Kata Kunci: neuro-entrepreneurship, heuristik pengambilan keputusan, viralitas media sosial, pemasaran berbasis komunitas, ekuitas merek

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INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly competitive food industry landscape, brand equity has emerged as a crucial intangible asset for businesses striving to maintain consumer loyalty and achieve sustainable growth. Brand equity refers to the value that a brand adds to a product, as perceived by the consumer, and is shaped by factors such as brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty (Chansongpol et al., 2022). For food products, brand equity plays a significant role in influencing purchase decisions, especially in a market saturated with numerous choices and limited product differentiation. Consumers tend to gravitate toward brands they perceive as trustworthy, familiar, and relevant, and these perceptions are often rooted in the strategic efforts of businesses to create a strong brand identity and emotional connection with their audience (Moss et al., 2021). As such, enhancing brand equity has become a strategic priority, especially for small and medium-sized food enterprises (SMEs) that need to compete with larger and more established brands.

The emergence of neuro-entrepreneurship introduces a novel perspective on how entrepreneurial cognition and neurological processes can influence business outcomes. Neuro-entrepreneurship integrates principles from neuroscience and entrepreneurship to understand how entrepreneurs think, make decisions, and react under uncertainty (Mithursan et al., 2024). This approach recognizes that entrepreneurs do not always act rationally; instead, their behaviors are shaped by subconscious biases, emotions, and neural responses. By understanding these neurological underpinnings, food entrepreneurs can design more effective brand strategies that align with consumer behavior patterns and emotional triggers. For instance, emotional branding—guided by neural responses—can create deeper connections with consumers, thus enhancing brand equity. Consequently, neuro-entrepreneurship holds potential for transforming conventional marketing strategies into more psychologically attuned and impactful approaches in the food industry (Leong, n.d.; Sharma et al., 2021).

Decision-making heuristics also play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior and entrepreneurial strategy, particularly in high-uncertainty environments like food startups. Heuristics are mental shortcuts or rules of thumb that simplify decision-making processes, especially when individuals face time constraints or information overload (Centeno, 2022). Entrepreneurs often rely on heuristics such as affect, availability, or representativeness to make rapid decisions about branding, pricing, or promotions. From the consumer's perspective, heuristics affect how brand messages are interpreted and how purchasing decisions are made. For instance, a consumer might choose a food brand because it “feels right” (affect heuristic) or because it resembles another trusted brand (representativeness heuristic). While heuristics

can be beneficial, they may also lead to biases and inconsistencies in perception. Understanding how heuristics influence brand-related decision-making can help food marketers craft messages and experiences that align with the intuitive cognitive processes of their target audiences (Ooms, Annen, Panda, Meunier, et al., 2024; Pérez Centeno, 2022).

Another dimension that contributes significantly to brand equity is community-based marketing, which emphasizes the importance of building strong, participatory relationships with local communities. Community-based marketing involves grassroots strategies that engage consumers in authentic, localized ways, fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty (Guillory et al., 2017). In the context of food businesses—especially those with artisanal or local origins—community support can be a powerful brand asset. By participating in local events, sourcing ingredients locally, and aligning with community values, food brands can position themselves as socially responsible and culturally relevant. This approach not only humanizes the brand but also encourages word-of-mouth marketing and long-term customer relationships. When consumers feel personally connected to a brand through shared experiences or values, their loyalty intensifies, thereby enhancing brand equity (Bastian et al., 2025). Thus, community-based marketing represents a vital tool for food brands seeking to cultivate meaningful and enduring connections.

Despite the growing recognition of brand equity as a critical success factor for food businesses, there is still limited empirical research on how emerging entrepreneurial and marketing strategies—such as neuro-entrepreneurship, decision-making heuristics, social media virality, and community-based marketing—contribute to building brand equity, particularly in the food sector. Previous studies have often treated these constructs in isolation, without examining their combined or interactive effects on brand outcomes. Additionally, the rapid digital transformation and evolving consumer behaviors necessitate a reevaluation of traditional branding approaches. Therefore, there is a pressing need to explore the interplay between cognitive, digital, and community-based strategies in shaping food product brand equity in today's dynamic market environment. This study aims to examine the effect of neuro-entrepreneurship, decision-making heuristics, social media virality, and community-based marketing on food product brand equity.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the effects of neuro-entrepreneurship, decision-making heuristics, social media virality, and community-based marketing on food product brand equity. A structured survey questionnaire was developed

based on validated scales from previous studies to measure each variable. Neuro-entrepreneurship was assessed through items reflecting entrepreneurial cognition and emotional influence, decision-making heuristics were measured using scales related to common mental shortcuts, social media virality was captured by the frequency and impact of viral content sharing, and community-based marketing was evaluated through perceptions of local engagement and consumer participation. Brand equity was measured using (D. Aaker, 1991) brand equity dimensions, including brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The sample for this research consists of consumers of food products within a selected urban region known for its active food markets and digital engagement. Using purposive sampling, respondents were targeted who have purchased food products within the last six months and who actively engage with social media platforms. Data collection was conducted online through social media groups, food forums, and mailing lists over a period of four weeks. A total of 350 valid responses were obtained and analyzed. Prior to the main analysis, data screening was performed to check for missing values, outliers, and normality. Reliability and validity of the measurement instruments were confirmed through Cronbach's alpha and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), ensuring that the constructs accurately represent the theoretical concepts.

Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) with the help of SmartPLS. SEM allows for the simultaneous assessment of multiple independent variables and their direct and indirect effects on brand equity, thus providing a robust framework for testing the proposed hypotheses. The model fit was evaluated using common indices including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Chi-square statistics. Additionally, mediation or moderation effects were explored to understand the interplay between variables more deeply, if relevant. The results were interpreted with attention to both statistical significance and practical implications, enabling comprehensive insights for food entrepreneurs and marketers aiming to enhance brand equity through cognitive, social, and community-based strategies.

RESULTS

Measurement Model Assessment

The reliability and validity of the constructs were evaluated through internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite

Reliability (CR) were used to assess internal consistency. All constructs exhibited good reliability with Cronbach’s Alpha values ranging from 0.812 to 0.917 and CR values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity was confirmed by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 for all constructs, indicating that more than half of the variance in the indicators was explained by the latent variables.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Neuro-Entrepreneurship	0.859	0.893	0.619
Decision-Making Heuristics	0.812	0.865	0.572
Social Media Virality	0.917	0.939	0.682
Community-Based Marketing	0.884	0.912	0.635
Brand Equity	0.904	0.928	0.651

Source: Data Analysis

Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Each construct’s AVE square root was greater than its highest correlation with any other construct, demonstrating adequate discriminant validity.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

Construct	NEU	DMH	SMV	CBM	BEQ
Neuro-Entrepreneurship (NEU)	0.787				
Decision-Making Heuristics (DMH)	0.482	0.756			
Social Media Virality (SMV)	0.530	0.489	0.826		

Community- Based Marketing (CBM)	0.604	0.524	0.558	0.797
Brand Equity (BEQ)	0.618	0.572	0.599	0.807

Source: Data Analysis

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated through path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R²), and effect size (f²). The R² value for brand equity was 0.682, indicating that 68.2% of the variance in brand equity is explained by the four predictor variables, which reflects substantial explanatory power.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

Path	β	t-value	p-value	f ²
Neuro- Entrepreneurship → Brand Equity	0.305	5.214	0.000	0.078
Decision- Making Heuristics → Brand Equity	0.214	3.487	0.001	0.042
Social Media Virality → Brand Equity	0.271	4.102	0.000	0.056
Community- Based Marketing → Brand Equity	0.338	5.987	0.000	0.089

Source: Data Analysis

All path coefficients were positive and statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, indicating that neuro-entrepreneurship, decision-making heuristics, social media virality, and community-based marketing positively influence brand equity. Community-based marketing showed the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.338$), followed closely by neuro-entrepreneurship ($\beta = 0.305$). The model fit was satisfactory based on the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR = 0.049),

indicating good fit as values below 0.08 are considered acceptable. Additionally, the normed fit index (NFI) was 0.912, supporting the adequacy of the structural model.

DISCUSSION

Neuro-Entrepreneurship and Brand Equity

The results indicate a significant positive effect of neuro-entrepreneurship on food product brand equity. This finding aligns with the growing body of research emphasizing the importance of understanding entrepreneurial cognition and emotional processes in business success (Ooms, Annen, Panda, Cecconi, et al., 2024). Neuro-entrepreneurship, by integrating neuroscience into entrepreneurial decision-making, highlights how entrepreneurs' neurological responses—such as emotional engagement, risk perception, and cognitive biases—influence the creation and management of brands. This study confirms that entrepreneurs who are attuned to these neurological and psychological aspects are better equipped to develop strong brand identities that resonate emotionally with consumers.

From a theoretical perspective, this supports the notion that brand equity is not only built through external marketing efforts but also through the entrepreneur's internal cognitive and emotional framework. Entrepreneurs who can anticipate and manage their own neurological responses tend to craft brand narratives that tap into consumers' subconscious motivations, enhancing brand loyalty and perceived quality. Practically, this suggests that training programs and coaching for food entrepreneurs should incorporate elements of neuro-entrepreneurship, helping them to understand and leverage cognitive and emotional factors to foster stronger brand connections.

Decision-Making Heuristics and Brand Equity

The positive impact of decision-making heuristics on brand equity found in this study corroborates prior research in behavioral economics and consumer psychology (D. A. Aaker, 2009; Kim & Ko, 2012). Heuristics—mental shortcuts people use to make quick judgments—play a crucial role in both entrepreneurial choices and consumer behavior. Entrepreneurs frequently rely on heuristics to make swift decisions about marketing strategies, product positioning, and resource allocation under uncertainty, especially in fast-moving food markets. Simultaneously, consumers use heuristics when choosing food brands, often favoring those that evoke positive feelings or familiarity, even if they lack detailed information.

This study's findings highlight that brands designed with an understanding of heuristics—such as using familiar packaging, leveraging affective cues, or simplifying decision points—can enhance brand equity by facilitating quicker, more confident consumer choices. For food marketers, this underscores the importance of simplifying brand messaging and focusing on emotional appeals that align with

consumer heuristics, thereby reducing decision complexity and fostering stronger brand associations. Moreover, it suggests that entrepreneurs should be aware of their own heuristic biases to avoid potentially detrimental decisions that could harm brand equity.

Social Media Virality and Brand Equity

This study's findings highlight that brands designed with an understanding of heuristics—such as using familiar packaging, leveraging affective cues, or simplifying decision points—can enhance brand equity by facilitating quicker, more confident consumer choices. For food marketers, this underscores the importance of simplifying brand messaging and focusing on emotional appeals that align with consumer heuristics, thereby reducing decision complexity and fostering stronger brand associations. Moreover, it suggests that entrepreneurs should be aware of their own heuristic biases to avoid potentially detrimental decisions that could harm brand equity.

The strong impact of social media virality on brand equity observed in this study confirms that food brands must embrace digital platforms as a core part of their branding strategies. Creating shareable, emotionally resonant, and visually appealing content can trigger viral spread, leading to heightened brand awareness and positive brand associations. Additionally, influencer collaborations and user-generated content serve as catalysts for virality, helping brands reach wider and more diverse consumer segments. From a managerial perspective, food entrepreneurs should invest in social media analytics and creative digital marketing to harness the power of virality effectively, balancing creativity with strategic targeting to maximize brand equity.

Community-Based Marketing and Brand Equity

Among all the predictors, community-based marketing exhibited the strongest effect on brand equity, reinforcing the importance of localized, participatory marketing approaches in building strong consumer-brand relationships (Chen, 2010; Kapferer, 2008; Keller et al., 2010). This finding suggests that in the food industry, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, fostering genuine community engagement is a critical driver of brand loyalty, trust, and emotional attachment. Brands that actively involve local consumers through events, collaborations, and socially responsible initiatives are perceived as more authentic and trustworthy.

The results support the concept that brand equity is deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts and that community connections provide a sense of identity and belonging for consumers. Community-based marketing nurtures this sense of belonging by transforming consumers from passive buyers into active brand advocates. For food entrepreneurs, this means

that brand building should go beyond transactional marketing to embrace social value creation and community participation. Engaging local communities can generate word-of-mouth promotion and lasting brand equity that is resistant to competitors' price wars or marketing gimmicks.

Integrated Implications and Theoretical Contributions

The combined significance of neuro-entrepreneurship, decision-making heuristics, social media virality, and community-based marketing emphasizes that brand equity formation is a complex and multidimensional process. This study contributes to theory by integrating cognitive neuroscience, behavioral decision-making, digital marketing, and community theory in one model—an approach that is relatively novel in food marketing research. It demonstrates that entrepreneurial cognition (neuro-entrepreneurship) and consumer cognition (heuristics) are intertwined with social dynamics (social media virality and community marketing) in building valuable food brands. The high explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.682$) indicates that these factors collectively account for a substantial portion of brand equity variance. This underscores the need for a holistic approach that simultaneously addresses internal entrepreneurial capabilities, consumer psychology, digital engagement, and social connectedness.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study advances understanding of brand equity drivers in the food sector, it has limitations that warrant consideration. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how these factors evolve over time. The sample focused on urban consumers with social media engagement, potentially limiting generalizability to rural or offline consumers. Future research could examine moderating effects of demographic factors, cultural differences, or product categories. Additionally, exploring potential mediation effects—such as whether social media virality mediates the relationship between community marketing and brand equity—would enrich theoretical understanding. Qualitative approaches might also complement these findings by revealing deeper insights into consumer emotional responses and community dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that neuro-entrepreneurship, decision-making heuristics, social media virality, and community-based marketing each play a significant and positive role in shaping food product brand equity. By integrating cognitive, behavioral, digital, and social factors, the findings highlight the complex and interconnected nature of brand equity

development in the contemporary food market. Entrepreneurs who leverage their neurological insights, design marketing strategies that align with consumer heuristics, actively engage in viral social media campaigns, and foster strong community ties are more likely to build robust and enduring brands. These insights not only enrich academic understanding but also offer practical guidance for food industry practitioners aiming to enhance brand value and consumer loyalty in a highly competitive environment. Future research is encouraged to explore these relationships further, including longitudinal dynamics and diverse consumer segments, to deepen the understanding of brand equity formation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For practitioners, these findings offer actionable insights. Food entrepreneurs should consider enhancing their cognitive awareness and emotional intelligence through neuro-entrepreneurship training to better align their brand-building efforts with consumer psychological triggers. Marketing campaigns should be designed with heuristics in mind, simplifying consumer decisions while emotionally engaging them. Moreover, the critical role of social media virality calls for investment in creative digital content and influencer partnerships that encourage sharing and community participation. Finally, embedding brands within local communities and fostering authentic consumer interactions will reinforce trust and loyalty, which are fundamental for sustainable brand equity.

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