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Brand Love, Customer Brand Engagement, and Brand Pride as Predictors of Brand Defense among Indonesian iPhone 17 Series Users

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how brand love, customer brand engagement, brand pride, and regulatory focus are associated with brand defense among Indonesian iPhone 17 Series users. Cross-sectional data from 350 respondents recruited through purposive sampling were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4. Brand love was positively associated with customer brand engagement, which was positively associated with brand defense. The direct association between brand love and brand defense was nonsignificant, whereas the indirect association through customer brand engagement was significant, supporting a pattern of indirect-only mediation. Brand pride also showed a positive direct association with brand defense. Promotion focus and prevention focus did not significantly moderate either the brand love-engagement association or the corresponding indirect association, indicating that regulatory focus did not function as a boundary condition in this context. Together, the proposed predictors explained 50.9% of the variance in brand defense. The findings extend the consumer-brand relationship perspective by identifying customer brand engagement as a relational pathway linking brand love with brand defense and brand pride as a complementary identity-related predictor. These findings provide insight into why consumers defend identity-relevant premium brands and highlight engagement and brand pride as important considerations for brand management.

Keywords: Brand Love, Brand Defense, Customer Brand Engagement, Regulatory Focus, Brand Pride, Premium Smartphones
JEL Classifications: M31, D91

1. INTRODUCTION

Premium smartphones function not only as communication devices but also as markers of identity, lifestyle, and social status. Consumers often favour brands that reflect their sense of identity and use them to communicate who they are or aspire to become (Munteanu and Pagalea, 2014). Evidence from Indonesia suggests that the iPhone carries symbolic meanings related to luxury, social status, lifestyle, self-confidence, and pride (Sari et al., 2023). Self-brand congruity has also been shown to increase individual and collective brand pride among Indonesian iPhone users (Tesalonika and Susilowati, 2023). These findings suggest that criticism of a symbolically meaningful premium brand may also affect how consumers evaluate themselves.

The iPhone 17 Series provides a relevant setting for examining such responses. Shortly after the release of the Pro and Pro Max models, reports of scratches, scuffs, and chipping generated public discussion about whether their cosmetic durability met expectations of premium quality (Patel, 2025). These reports motivate the broader question of why consumers may defend a symbolically meaningful product family when it is criticized.

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However, the present survey did not manipulate exposure to this controversy or measure respondents' awareness of it; the reports therefore serve only as contextual motivation.

Negative brand-related information does not always lead consumers to reject a brand. Brand love (hereafter referred to as BLV), brand commitment, and self-brand connection may reduce consumers' susceptibility to negative information, although they do not provide complete protection (Merlo et al., 2024; Wiese et al., 2026). One possible response is brand defense (hereafter referred to as BDF), a voluntary protective behavior in which consumers speak on behalf of or defend a brand when it is criticized or challenged (Chou and Chen, 2025; Sawaftah et al., 2021). Unlike routine loyalty or general positive word of mouth, BDF arises specifically in response to threats or unfavorable information. This raises an important question: Why do some consumers defend a premium brand when its quality or user experience is questioned?

BLV may provide the emotional basis for this response. Previous studies have identified BLV as an important antecedent of customer loyalty and favourable electronic word-of-mouth behavior (Liu and Yan, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). However, these outcomes reflect favorable responses toward a brand and do not directly explain protective behavior under criticism. BLV may create a strong emotional connection, but another factor may be needed to translate that attachment into active defense.

Customer brand engagement (hereafter referred to as CBEG) may provide the mechanism through which this occurs. Rather than representing mere emotional attachment, it captures the mental effort, emotional involvement, and behavioral participation that consumers invest in brand-related activities (Razmus, 2021). Chou and Chen (2025) found that BLV enhanced CBEG, which then strengthened BDF and served as a mediator in the association between BLV and BDF. Behavioral engagement has also been associated with consumers' willingness to defend brands (AlFraihat et al., 2025; Sawaftah et al., 2021). These results indicate a relational-engagement pathway in which BLV creates attachment and CBEG converts that attachment into protective behavior.

Brand pride (hereafter referred to as BPR) may provide a distinct identity-based explanation. BLV reflects affection toward a brand, whereas pride is a self-conscious emotion linked to evaluations of the self or social identity (Chou and Chen, 2025; Salice and Sánchez, 2016). BPR may therefore arise when association with a brand strengthens consumers' positive self-evaluation. Among Indonesian iPhone users, self-brand congruity has been shown to increase individual and collective BPR (Tesalonika and Susilowati, 2023). Consumers may also resist negative information when criticism of an identity-relevant brand is perceived as threatening their self-concept (Wiese et al., 2026). BPR is therefore proposed as a direct identity-protective predictor of BDF.

Previous studies have investigated BLV as a predictor of CBEG and engagement as a driver of BDF, and BPR as a consequence of self-brand congruity (Chou and Chen, 2025; Sawaftah et al., 2021; Tesalonika and Susilowati, 2023). These streams have rarely been evaluated together to determine whether BPR explains additional variance in BDF beyond the relational sequence from BLV to engagement and then to defense. The unresolved issue is therefore not merely whether both emotions matter, but whether they represent empirically distinct sources of BDF.

In response to this unresolved issue, the present research conceptually replicates and extends the brand-defense framework of Chou and Chen (2025). The replication component re-examines the associations among BLV, CBEG, and BDF, together with the proposed boundary conditions, in the Indonesian iPhone 17 Series context. Because the research context and the retained moderator items differ from those used in the original study, this research is positioned as a conceptual rather than an exact replication (Nosek and Errington, 2020).

Regulatory focus (hereafter referred to as RF) is retained as a potential boundary condition of the relational-engagement pathway. Chou and Chen (2025) demonstrated that promotion focus (hereafter referred to as PRMF) strengthened the association between BLV and CBEG, whereas prevention focus (hereafter referred to as PRVF) weakened it. Regulatory-fit research also shows that promotion and prevention orientations may shape the effects of brand-identification processes across cultural contexts (Chen et al., 2022). Within the present study, however, RF serves as a secondary boundary condition rather than its primary theoretical extension.

The principal extension is the inclusion of BPR as an identity-related predictor of BDF alongside the indirect association of BLV through CBEG. This extension allows the study to assess whether positive self-evaluation associated with the focal product family explains BDF beyond affection and engagement. The Indonesian context is relevant because the iPhone has been associated with luxury, status, lifestyle, confidence, and pride, while self-brand congruity has been linked with BPR among Indonesian iPhone users (Sari et al., 2023; Tesalonika and Susilowati, 2023).

Accordingly, this study investigates the direct relationship of BLV with both CBEG and BDF, the association of engagement with BDF, and the indirect association of BLV with BDF through engagement. It also examines whether PRMF and PRVF condition the first stage of this indirect association and whether BPR explains additional variation in BDF. By distinguishing a mediated relational association from a direct identity-related predictor, the study seeks to clarify why consumers may report a willingness to defend a symbolically meaningful product family.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Consumer-brand relationship (hereafter referred to as CBR) Theory provides a relational perspective for explaining the psychological and behavioral processes examined in this study. The theory suggests that consumers can develop enduring and meaningful bonds with brands that resemble the relationships they establish with other people (Fournier, 1998). As these interactions

continue over time, brands may become embedded in consumers' experiences, emotions, and self-concepts, resulting in enduring psychological connections.

Within the proposed framework, CBR Theory explains the relational process in which BLV reflects consumers' affection and emotional attachment, whereas CBEG represents the cognitive, affective, and behavioral resources devoted to interactions with the brand. As consumers become more emotionally attached to the brand, their level of engagement with the brand is likely to increase, thereby increasing their tendency to defend the brand against criticism (Aziz and Ahmed, 2023; Chou and Chen, 2025; Hashem et al., 2024; Sawaftah et al., 2021).

Rather than being incorporated into an additional mediating mechanism, BPR is treated as an independent antecedent that directly explains identity-driven BDF. Consumers may experience pride when association with a brand or product family contributes to a favorable evaluation of the self (Kaur and Verma, 2024). According to self-threat theory, negative evaluations of a brand that consumers regard as part of their identity can be perceived as threats to the self. Defensive actions toward the brand may therefore serve as a means of preserving consumers' identity. When a valued brand is criticized, consumers may defend it because preserving the brand's image also helps preserve an identity that is personally meaningful to them (Cheng et al., 2012; Yu et al., 2023).

Accordingly, CBR theory provides the broader basis for the proposed associations among BLV, engagement, and BDF, whereas the self-threat perspective explains why BPR may account for additional variation in BDF. CBEG is therefore modeled as a relational mediator, while BPR is modeled as a distinct direct predictor. The cross-sectional design nevertheless permits tests of statistical indirect associations, not definitive evidence of psychological mechanisms over time.

This study also incorporates regulatory focus theory (hereafter referred to as RFT) to complement CBR theory in explaining when BLV is more likely to stimulate CBEG. Rather than assuming that consumers respond uniformly to BLV, RFT suggests that motivational orientation shapes behavioral responses. Higgins (1998) proposed that self-regulation operates through two distinct motivational orientations. PRMF emphasizes pursuing progress and desired achievements by encouraging individuals to strive for personal aspirations and ideal goals. By comparison, those with a PRVF emphasize vigilance by seeking to fulfil responsibilities, preserve stability, and avoid situations that could produce undesirable consequences. These distinct motivational orientations provide a useful explanation for differences in the extent to which BLV is translated into active engagement with a brand.

Within the context of CBR, RFT explains that consumers who equally love a brand may differ in the extent to which they actively engage with it because their motivational orientations are different. Differences in regulatory orientation influence how consumers react to brand-related situations. Consumers driven by aspirations and opportunities for improvement are typically more willing to interact with and continue supporting a preferred brand, even when it receives negative evaluations. Conversely, consumers whose decisions are guided by vigilance and the fulfilment of responsibilities tend to respond more cautiously because they place greater importance on preventing undesirable consequences. Consequently, they are more likely to adopt a cautious response when a brand they value becomes the target of criticism (Higgins, 1998). The proposed model also considers consumers' regulatory orientation as an important boundary condition. Differences in consumers' promotion-focused and prevention-focused orientations may alter the extent to which BLV translates into CBEG and subsequently contributes to BDF.

2.1. Brand Defense

BDF describes consumers' willingness to actively support and safeguard a brand when it is challenged by criticism, negative opinions, or other unfavorable information. This behavior goes beyond conventional positive word of mouth because consumers actively challenge criticism, clarify misunderstandings, and reinforce the brand's positive image in front of others (Ali et al., 2021). Within CBR Theory, defending a brand is viewed as a relational response that emerges when consumers become committed to maintaining the value of an important brand relationship (Sawaftah et al., 2021). Individuals who exhibit BDF are likely to express favorable opinions, counter negative claims, and stand up for the brand when it is criticized (Wilk et al., 2020). Consumers demonstrate a greater tendency to engage in BDF once they experience strong satisfaction and develop meaningful emotional bonds with a brand (Sawaftah et al., 2021). BDF extends beyond conventional brand advocacy. Instead of merely sharing favorable experiences, consumers actively respond to criticism and take deliberate actions to safeguard the brand from reputational threats (Sawaftah et al., 2021).

2.2. Brand Love

Consumers experience BLV when a brand becomes personally meaningful and occupies an important place in their lives. Under these circumstances, the CBR evolves into a durable emotional bond characterized by sustained affection, psychological closeness, and a willingness to preserve the relationship over time (Hashem et al., 2024; Yang and Mundel, 2022). Consumers who develop BLV tend to perceive the brand as emotionally meaningful, giving rise to favorable feelings and positive psychological responses that strengthen their overall evaluation of the brand (Hashem et al., 2024; Yang and Mundel, 2022). Positive evaluations of a brand, such as satisfaction and loyalty, do not necessarily indicate the presence of a strong emotional relationship. BLV represents a qualitatively different psychological state in which the brand becomes personally meaningful and emotionally significant to consumers. It reflects an enduring attachment that goes beyond being merely satisfied or loyal and indicates a deeper level of psychological commitment (Hashem et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2021). BLV reflects an enduring psychological connection that motivates consumers to sustain a long-term relationship with the brand. This enduring connection is reflected in persistent emotional attachment and a continued willingness to maintain the relationship (Hashem et al., 2024).

2.3. Brand Pride

BPR reflects a favorable emotional response that arises when consumers regard a brand as an important part of their identity and evaluate it positively. This emotion emerges because the brand carries personal meaning and value for the individual (Kaur and Verma, 2024). Drawing on appraisal theory, BPR emerges from consumers' evaluation of a brand that is closely connected to their self-concept or extended self (Belk, 1988; Kaur and Verma, 2023; Scherer, 2022). Consumers are likely to experience feelings of pride when a brand becomes an important expression of their identity and supports how they see themselves. Under these circumstances, the brand gains personal significance beyond its functional value. Positive evaluations of a brand that aligns with their motives and identity further strengthen feelings of pride toward that brand (Belk, 1988; Kaur and Verma, 2024; Roseman et al., 1996). Therefore, BPR reflects consumers' favorable evaluation of a brand that is personally meaningful and closely connected to their self-concept, representing a positive self-conscious emotion (Kaur and Verma, 2024).

BLV and BPR both represent favourable emotional responses toward a brand, yet they capture different psychological experiences. BLV describes the development of a deep emotional bond characterized by affection and enduring attachment (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). In contrast, BPR arises from consumers' positive evaluation of a brand that is closely connected with their self-identity, generating feelings of personal pride and self-worth (Kaur and Verma, 2024). Therefore, while BLV primarily reflects affection toward the brand itself, BPR is driven by consumers' positive evaluation of a brand that has become associated with their self-concept, making it a conceptually distinct construct within CBR.

2.4. Regulatory Focus

RFT explains that individual differences in self-regulation arise from distinct motivational orientations. Instead, differences in motivational orientation shape how individuals approach goals, make decisions, and evaluate the consequences of their actions (Higgins, 1998). The theory argues that differences in self-regulation arise from contrasting motivational priorities. A promotion-oriented approach directs attention toward growth, aspirations, and opportunities for achievement, whereas a prevention-oriented approach encourages careful behavior aimed at protecting security, satisfying obligations, and minimizing exposure to potential risks (Higgins, 1998; Peng et al., 2022). Accordingly, differences in RF may shape how consumers respond to the same marketing stimulus because their decisions are guided by distinct motivational priorities. In consumer contexts, these motivational orientations shape consumers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses toward brands (Chou and Chen, 2025). Promotion-focused consumers generally adopt a more exploratory approach, while prevention-focused consumers are inclined to respond more cautiously (Peng et al., 2022). Therefore, RF is considered an important moderating variable because motivational orientation may strengthen or weaken relationships between brand-related constructs (Chou and Chen, 2025).

2.4.1. Promotion focus

PRMF describes a motivational orientation in which individuals are primarily motivated by aspirations, advancement, and the pursuit of desirable outcomes (Higgins, 1998). Rather than concentrating on preventing losses, promotion-focused individuals tend to direct their efforts toward achieving gains and fulfilling their aspirations (Higgins, 1998). They are generally more proactive in pursuing desired goals and striving for personal growth and advancement (Higgins, 1998). Furthermore, promotion-focused individuals tend to interpret information from a broader perspective, favour actions that facilitate goal attainment, and actively initiate behaviors that support the achievement of their desired outcomes (Chou and Chen, 2025; Winterheld and Simpson, 2011). In consumer contexts, this orientation predisposes consumers to perceive brand-related experiences as opportunities for personal growth, positive feelings, and self-enhancement, which may increase their willingness to engage with brands (Chou and Chen, 2025; Kordrostami and Kordrostami, 2019).

2.4.2. Prevention focus

Individuals with a prevention-focused orientation regulate their behavior by giving priority to caution, the fulfilment of obligations, and the preservation of security. Their decisions are primarily directed toward preventing undesirable outcomes rather than pursuing potential gains (Higgins, 1998). These individuals tend to focus on fulfilling obligations, minimizing potential losses, and responding cautiously to potential risks (Chou and Chen, 2025; Higgins, 1998). Consequently, they are more likely to avoid conflict and adopt vigilant strategies to maintain a sense of security (Chou and Chen, 2025; Winterheld and Simpson, 2011). In consumer contexts, this orientation encourages individuals to approach brand-related experiences cautiously, placing greater emphasis on avoiding negative outcomes (Chou and Chen, 2025).

2.5. Customer Brand Engagement

CBEG reflects the extent to which consumers invest their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors while interacting with a brand. This investment captures the level of consumers' active involvement in the brand relationship (Aziz and Ahmed, 2023; Razmus, 2021). In this study, CBEG is operationalized specifically through engagement with iPhone 17 Series content on social media, including thinking about the product family, experiencing positive feelings while browsing its content, and devoting time to such content. Interpretations and managerial implications are therefore limited primarily to social-media engagement rather than all online and offline brand interactions.

2.6. Brand Love and Customer Brand Engagement

Previous studies consistently supported BLV's association with CBEG. Greater intensity of BLV encourages individuals to engage more actively with their preferred brands, indicating that BLV functions as an important antecedent of CBEG (Dahrouj et al., 2025; Rathnayaka and Dissanayake, 2023; Roberto, 2017). The theoretical discussion presented above leads to the hypothesis presented below:

H_1: BLV is positively associated with CBEG.

2.7. Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Defense

CBEG reflects consumers' active involvement in maintaining relationships with brands through continuous interactions. As consumers become more engaged with a brand, they become more committed to maintaining the CBR and are more likely to support, advocate for, and defend it when confronted with criticism or negative information. Accordingly, higher levels of CBEG are expected to increase the BDF behavior (Harrigan et al., 2021). The preceding discussion leads to the hypothesis presented below:

H_2: CBEG is positively associated with BDF.

2.8. Brand Love and Brand Defense

Consumers who develop stronger BLV exhibit a greater tendency to support and defend a brand when it is confronted with criticism or unfavorable information (Javed, 2017). Previous studies consistently indicate that BLV functions as a positive antecedent to BDF by increasing consumers' willingness to protect, advocate for, and defend brands they value (Ali et al., 2021; Harrigan et al., 2021). Previous studies consistently recognize BDF as one of the key outcomes associated with BLV within CBR (Sanz-Blas et al., 2025). Furthermore, empirical evidence confirms that BLV significantly enhances BDF behavior (Le et al., 2026). Drawing from these discussions, the hypothesis below is developed:

H_3: BLV is positively associated with BDF.

2.9. Brand Love, Customer Brand Engagement, and Brand Defense

CBEG is an important mechanism through which consumers translate their psychological connection with a brand into favorable behavioral responses. Consumers who cultivate greater emotional bond and affection for a brand tend to participate in brand-related interactions, thereby reinforcing their relationship with the brand as well as increasing supportive behavioral responses (Chou and Chen, 2025). Prior studies have consistently recognized CBEG as a mediating mechanism connecting various relationship-oriented constructs, including consumer-brand identification, value congruity, brand trust, customer experience, and relationship quality, with favorable outcomes such as purchase intention, revisit intention, and brand loyalty (Aziz and Ahmed, 2023; Bağcı and Taşçıoğlu, 2024; Rather and Sharma, 2022; Setini et al., 2020; Tarabieh et al., 2024).

Emerging empirical evidence suggests that CBEG strengthens CBR by encouraging active participation in brand interactions and fostering stronger emotional ties with brands (Aziz et al., 2025; Chou and Chen, 2025). More importantly, Chou and Chen (2025) specifically demonstrated that CBEG serves as a mediator connecting BLV with BDF. Consumers with stronger BLV tend to interact with that brand more intensively, and this engagement subsequently increases their willingness to support, advocate for, and defend the brand when confronted with criticism or negative information.

Accordingly, consumers of the iPhone 17 Series who experience stronger BLV are expected to engage more actively with that brand, thereby increasing their propensity to support and defend it when confronted with criticism or unfavorable information. Therefore, CBEG is expected to mediate the relationship between BLV and BDF. Accordingly, the hypothesis stated below is formulated:

H_4: BLV has a positive indirect association with BDF through CBEG.

2.10. Brand Love, Regulatory Focus, and Customer Brand Engagement

2.10.1. Promotion focus

Consumers experiencing strong BLV are generally more inclined to develop higher levels of CBEG (Chou and Chen, 2025). However, the strength of this relationship may vary depending on individuals' regulatory orientation (Chou and Chen, 2025). These consumers tend to pursue growth, aspirations, and desirable outcomes. Consequently, they generally demonstrate a tendency to proactively engage in actions that help achieve desired outcomes (Guo et al., 2024; Higgins, 1998). In a branding context, this orientation may encourage consumers to translate positive emotions toward a brand into higher levels of CBEG. Consistent with this argument, Chou and Chen (2025) found that PRMF strengthens the positive association between BLV and CBEG. Therefore, PRMF is anticipated to enhance the indirect association between BLV and BDF through CBEG (Chou and Chen, 2025). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H_5a: PRMF positively moderates the association between BLV and CBEG, such that the association is stronger at higher levels of PRMF.

2.10.2. Prevention focus

Conversely, prevention-focused consumers are inclined to prioritize security and responsibility while avoiding negative outcomes (Higgins, 1998). Consequently, they tend to adopt more cautious and avoidance-oriented responses and are generally less inclined to exhibit proactive behaviors (Guo et al., 2024; Jing et al., 2024). Consistent with this reasoning, Chou and Chen (2025) found that PRVF weakens the positive association between BLV and CBEG. Therefore, PRVF is anticipated to weaken the indirect association between BLV and BDF through CBEG (Chou and Chen, 2025). Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that:

H_5b: PRVF negatively moderates the association between BLV and CBEG, such that the association is weaker at higher levels of PRVF.

2.11. Brand Love, Customer Brand Engagement, Brand Defense, and Regulatory Focus

Given that CBEG is proposed as a mediator linking BLV and BDF (H_4), while PRMF and PRVF are expected to moderate the association between BLV and CBEG (H_{5a} and H_{5b}), the indirect association between BLV and BDF through CBEG is also expected to vary across levels of RF. This reflects a first-stage moderated mediation effect (Chou and Chen, 2025). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H_6a: The positive indirect association between BLV and BDF through CBEG is stronger at higher levels of PRMF.

H_6b: The positive indirect association between BLV and BDF through CBEG is weaker at higher levels of PRVF.

2.12. Brand Pride and Brand Defense

BPR represents a positive self-conscious emotion that develops when consumers appraise a brand connected to themselves as valuable, personally meaningful, and relevant to their self-image (Kaur and Verma, 2024). Although BPR and BLV are both positive brand-related emotions, they represent different psychological mechanisms. BLV primarily reflects affection, attachment, and passion toward the brand, whereas BPR reflects consumers' positive self-evaluation derived from their association with the brand. Accordingly, BPR is positioned in this study as a distinct predictor of BDF rather than as a consequence resulting from BLV.

A self-threat perspective provides a theoretical explanation for why BPR may encourage BDF. When a brand becomes part of consumers' self-concept, unfavorable evaluations of that brand may be interpreted as threatening their positive self-view. Such perceptions increase the likelihood of protective responses directed toward the brand (Cheng et al., 2012). For consumers who derive pride from a brand, negative judgements about that brand may carry personal psychological significance rather than being viewed as ordinary unfavorable product evaluation. Because the brand contributes to their identity, they may respond by expressing support and protecting the brand, thereby preserving a favorable perception of themselves.

This reasoning is consistent with the theoretical discussion by Yu et al. (2023) which suggests that negative information about a brand closely connected to consumers' self-concept may be viewed as a threat to one's self, thereby triggering resistance to that information. In this study, such resistance is viewed as conceptually related to BDF, a voluntary behavior through which consumers protect a brand against criticism or negative information (Sawaftah et al., 2021). For the iPhone 17 Series, individuals experiencing greater BPR may therefore exhibit greater willingness to highlight the brand's strengths, counter unfavorable claims, advocate for the brand, and defend it when criticism arises. BDF thus represents not only the protection of a valued brand but also a self-protective response through which consumers defend an identity-relevant aspect of themselves. Drawing on the theoretical arguments presented above, the hypothesis below is proposed:
H_7: BPR is positively associated with BDF.

2.13. Research Model

The proposed research model integrates six theoretically related constructs to explain the formation of BDF. Within this framework, BLV and BPR function as the primary antecedents, whereas CBEG represents the mechanism through which BLV contributes to BDF. The effectiveness of this mechanism is expected to vary according to consumers' motivational orientation; therefore, PRMF and PRVF are incorporated as the moderating dimensions of RF. The conceptual framework developed for the present study is illustrated in Figure 1.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey involving Indonesian consumers who currently owned and actively used an iPhone 17 Series device. The analysis examined the statistical links connecting BLV, CBEG, BDF, BPR, PRMF, and PRVF. The design is appropriate for evaluating a network of associations and conditional indirect effects among latent variables, but it does not establish temporal ordering or causality. The focal referent is the iPhone 17 Series product family; therefore, conclusions are limited to respondents' evaluations of that product family rather than the Apple brand as a whole.

3.2. Sampling and Sample Size

Respondents were selected through purposive sampling because direct experience with the focal product was required. Eligible participants were Indonesian consumers who currently owned and actively used one of the eligible iPhone 17 Series models, including the iPhone 17e, iPhone 17, iPhone Air, iPhone 17 Pro, and iPhone 17 Pro Max. A screening item was presented at the start of the questionnaire to verify current ownership and use of an eligible device. Responses that failed the eligibility or quality checks were excluded from the analytical sample.

The required sample size was determined using the inverse square root and gamma-exponential methods proposed by Kock and Hadaya (2018). To establish a conservative path-coefficient benchmark, the study referred to the interaction effects reported by Chou and Chen (2025): 0.282 for PRMF × BLV → CBEG and −0.182 for PRVF × BLV → CBEG. An anticipated minimum absolute path coefficient of $|\beta min| = 0.15$ was adopted, which was slightly smaller than the weakest reported absolute interaction effect.

For directional hypotheses, a one-tailed α of 0.05 and statistical power of 80% were used. Under these assumptions, the inverse square root method produced the following minimum sample requirement:

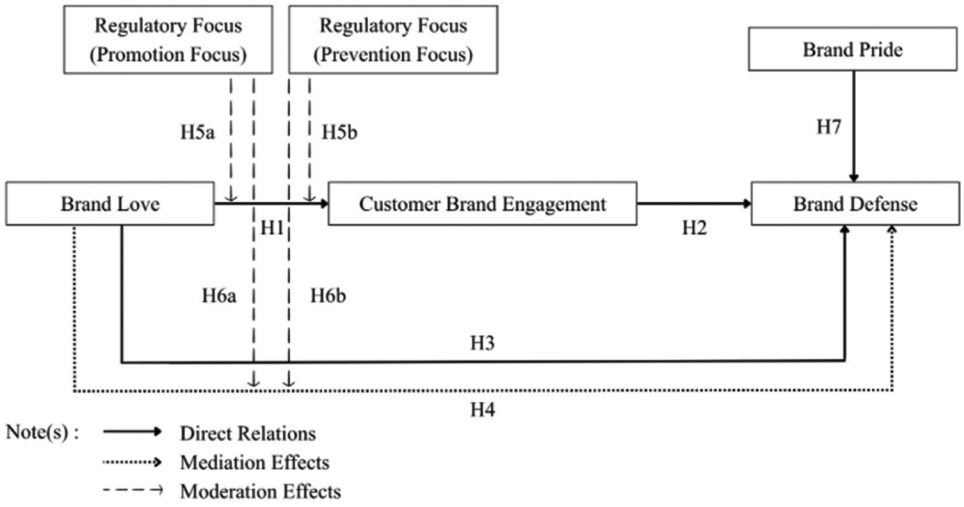
$$N_{min} > (2.486/|\beta_{min}|)^2 = (2.486/0.15)^2 = 274.68 \quad (1)$$

The result was rounded upward to a minimum requirement of 275 observations. Using the same anticipated minimum absolute path coefficient, significance level, and statistical power, the gamma-exponential method yielded a minimum requirement of 262 observations (Kock and Hadaya, 2018). Because the inverse square root method produced the larger estimate, 275 observations were adopted as the conservative minimum analytical sample.

Although the a priori power planning was based on directional one-tailed tests, all final structural inferences were evaluated using more conservative two-tailed tests at the 0.05 significance level.

To accommodate potential exclusions arising from eligibility and response-quality screening, an a priori recruitment target of 350 survey responses was established. This target provided a buffer of 75 responses, equivalent to approximately 27.3% above the conservative minimum requirement of 275. This buffer was intended to ensure that the final analytical sample would remain at or above 275 observations even if some responses were excluded during screening. A total of 375 survey entries were ultimately recorded, exceeding the predetermined recruitment target.

Figure 1: The proposed research model



Eligibility screening verified respondents' ownership and active use of an eligible iPhone 17 Series model, while response-quality screening assessed response completeness and patterns across the measurement items.

After the screening process, the final dataset comprised 350 responses that satisfied the eligibility and response-quality criteria, following the exclusion of 25 responses. The final usable sample exceeded the conservative minimum requirement of 275 observations by 75 observations and also exceeded the minimum requirement of 262 observations estimated using the gamma-exponential method.

3.3. Measurement

The questionnaire initially contained 42 items adapted from previously validated scales and represented six constructs: BLV (five items), CBEG (nine items), BDF (six items), PRMF (eight items), PRVF (seven items), and BPR (seven items). Items for BLV, CBEG, BDF, PRMF and PRVF were adapted from Chou and Chen (2025), whereas the BPR items were adapted from Kaur and Verma (2024). The brand-related items were contextualized to the iPhone 17 Series product family.

Representative items included "iPhone 17 Series makes me happy" for BLV, "Browsing iPhone 17 Series content on social media platforms gets me to think of it" for CBEG, "I will defend the iPhone 17 Series in conversations with others on social media" for BDF, "I often imagine how I will achieve my hopes" for PRMF, "I often think about how to prevent failure in my life" for PRVF, and "I have a sense of admiration for the iPhone 17 Series" for BPR. Participants rated each measurement item on a five-point Likert-type response format, anchored at 1 ("Strongly Disagree") and 5 ("Strongly Agree").

3.4. Data Collection

Ethical clearance for the study protocol and questionnaire was obtained from Universitas Pelita Harapan (Approval No. 052/MMBD/EC/VI/2026) before data collection commenced. Primary data were subsequently gathered electronically through a structured survey hosted on Google Forms. The survey instrument was organised into five parts: An informed-consent statement, screening questions, respondent demographics, measurement items, and closing statements. The research aims were explained to participants, who were also advised that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and the anonymous and confidential treatment of their responses. Only individuals who gave electronic informed consent and met the eligibility requirements were permitted to proceed with the survey. Data collection was conducted by circulating the survey link across online networking sites and messaging applications frequented by users of the focal smartphone series.

The study design included several procedural measures aimed at limiting the potential influence of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). At the outset, respondents were reminded that the survey sought subjective accounts rather than correct answers, and they were asked to provide candid responses grounded in their own experiences. The questionnaire also employed concise and unambiguous wording to reduce evaluation apprehension and response ambiguity.

3.5. Pre-Test

A pre-test was completed with 50 participants from the target population before the main survey to evaluate the initial 42-item instrument using SmartPLS 4. The quality of the proposed measurement model was examined for reliability and construct validity. Cronbach's alpha values fell between 0.874 and 0.928, whereas composite reliability estimates varied from 0.910 to 0.939. As every coefficient remained above the 0.70 benchmark, the measures demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. Convergent and discriminant validity were subsequently examined using their respective assessment criteria (Hair et al., 2021).

Outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to assess convergent validity. Six indicators (PRVF1, PRVF2, PRVF3, PRMF1, PRMF2, and PRMF3) were removed after their relatively low loadings contributed to insufficient convergent validity, particularly for PRMF, whose initial AVE was 0.442. The refined instrument retained 36 indicators: Five for BLV, nine for CBEG, six for BDF, five for PRMF, four for PRVF, and seven for

BPR. Because removing six RF indicators may narrow the content represented by these constructs, the nonsignificant interaction results are interpreted cautiously.

To determine whether the constructs were empirically distinct, the study applied the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) alongside the Fornell-Larcker criterion. None of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio values exceeded the 0.90 benchmark. The Fornell-Larcker results further indicated that, for every construct, the square root of the AVE was higher than all correlations shared with the remaining constructs. Both assessments therefore provided consistent evidence of acceptable discriminant validity. Taken together, the pilot findings supported the use of the revised 36-item measurement instrument in the main survey, as its reliability and validity results met the evaluation guidelines recommended by (Hair et al., 2021).

3.6. Data Analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was conducted in SmartPLS 4 using the path weighting scheme and standardized results. The measurement model was assessed using outer loadings and their 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, R^2, f^2, inner-model variance inflation factor (VIF), model-fit diagnostics, and out-of-sample prediction.

The interaction terms were estimated using the two-stage approach. PRMF and PRVF were included as constituent main-effect terms together with BLV and their respective interaction terms. Statistical significance was assessed using 10,000 bootstrap subsamples, two-tailed tests at the 0.05 significance level, 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals, and a fixed seed. The final dataset contained no missing values; therefore, no missing-data treatment was required.

Finally, the moderated mediation hypotheses were evaluated using bootstrapped indices of moderated mediation. The interaction effects were further illustrated using simple slope analysis at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of each moderator. PLSpredict was conducted using 10-fold cross-validation with 10 repetitions and the early-antecedents prediction approach. Prediction errors from the PLS-SEM model were compared with those produced by the linear-model benchmark.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Respondents Profile

The final analytic sample comprised 350 usable responses, with its composition reported in Table 1. Female respondents represented 54% of the sample and male respondents 46%, resulting in a nearly even gender split. By age category, respondents aged 18-24 formed the largest group at 57.2%, while those aged 25-34 accounted for 24%. These figures indicate that younger smartphone users dominated the sample.

Based on education, respondents holding a bachelor's degree accounted for the highest proportion of the sample (46.3%), and students accounted for the highest percentage of occupational group (39.4%). In terms of usage experience, 48.6% of the respondents had used the iPhone 17 Series for 3-5 months, followed by 26.6% for more than 5 months. Overall, the respondent profile reflects a diverse sample with adequate experience to evaluate the constructs examined in this study.

4.2. Measurement Model

Internal consistency was assessed for all constructs reported in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha values fell between 0.827 and 0.913, while composite reliability values varied from 0.876 to 0.930. Since every estimate was greater than the 0.70 benchmark, all constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2021). Indicator reliability and convergent validity were subsequently examined using the appropriate measurement criteria.

All average variance extracted (AVE) coefficients surpassed the 0.50 benchmark, with values between 0.515 and 0.690, thereby providing evidence of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021). Although several indicators exhibited outer loadings below the recommended value of 0.708, all remained above 0.66. According to Hair et al. (2021), loadings within the 0.40-0.70 interval do not, by themselves, justify indicator removal when the associated construct continues to meet the acceptable thresholds for composite reliability and AVE. Since all constructs satisfied these reliability and convergent validity criteria in the main study, the indicators were retained for the final measurement model.

The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) estimates reported in Table 2 remained uniformly below the 0.90 cut-off, thereby supporting adequate discriminant validity across the constructs by Hair et al. (2021), with the highest correlation was observed between CBEG and BDF (0.699). The HTMT assessment therefore provided evidence that the constructs achieved acceptable discriminant validity.

The diagonal entries in Table 3, representing the square roots of AVE, were greater than the corresponding off-diagonal correlations. This pattern satisfied the Fornell-Larcker criterion and provided further evidence that the constructs were empirically distinct (Hair et al., 2021). Having met the prescribed reliability and validity criteria, the measurement model provided a suitable basis for the subsequent analysis of the structural model.

4.3. Structural Model

Table 4 shows that BLV was positively associated with CBEG ($\beta = 0.372$, $t = 6.271$, $P < 0.001$), supporting H_1. CBEG was also positively associated with BDF ($\beta = 0.447$, $t = 7.492$, $P < 0.001$), supporting H_2, while BPR was positively associated with BDF ($\beta = 0.384$, $t = 6.900$, $P < 0.001$), supporting H_7. However, BLV was not significantly associated with BDF ($\beta = 0.021$, $t = 0.415$, $P = 0.678$); therefore, H_3 was not supported.

PRMF and PRVF were included as constituent main-effect terms in the moderation model. Both showed positive associations with CBEG (PRMF: $\beta = 0.201$, $t = 4.381$, $P < 0.001$; PRVF: $\beta = 0.114$, $t = 2.602$, $P = 0.009$). These constituent paths were included to

Table 1: Measurement model assessment

Variable and indicators	Reliability		Validity	
	Cronbach's alpha (>0.7)	Composite reliability (≥0.7)	AVE (>0.5)	Outer loading (>0.6)
BDF				
I will defend the iPhone 17 Series in a conversation with others on social media	0.896	0.921	0.662	0.855
I will shield the iPhone 17 Series in a conversation with others on social media				0.878
I would say positive things about the iPhone 17 Series.				0.691
I feel personally upset when the iPhone 17 Series is criticized				0.813
I tend to distrust criticism of the iPhone 17 Series				0.782
I would highlight the key strengths of the iPhone 17 Series when responding to criticism				0.849
BLV				
iPhone 17 Series makes me happy	0.827	0.876	0.586	0.818
I love the iPhone 17 Series				0.777
iPhone 17 Series provides a delightful satisfaction				0.747
I have a strong interest in the iPhone 17 Series				0.688
I feel attached to the iPhone 17 Series				0.792
BPR				
I admire the iPhone 17 Series	0.913	0.930	0.657	0.727
I am proud of the iPhone 17 Series				0.754
I respect the iPhone 17 Series				0.773
The iPhone 17 Series enhances my self-esteem				0.862
The iPhone 17 Series strengthens my self-image				0.860
The iPhone 17 Series gives me greater self-confidence				0.860
The iPhone 17 Series helps me stand out from others				0.827
PRMF				
I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes	0.888	0.917	0.689	0.818
I frequently imagine how I will achieve my aspirations				0.817
I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to reach my "ideal self", to fulfill my hopes				0.859
I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to reach my "ideal self", to fulfill my wishes				0.796
I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to reach my "ideal self", to fulfill my aspirations				0.859
PRVF				
I frequently think about how to prevent failures in my life	0.850	0.899	0.690	0.821
I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to become the self I "ought" to be by fulfilling my duties				0.841
I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to become the self I "ought" to be by fulfilling my responsibilities				0.835
I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to become the self I "ought" to be by fulfilling my obligations				0.825
CBEG				
Browsing iPhone 17 Series content on social media gets me to think about the brand	0.882	0.905	0.515	0.697
I often think about the iPhone 17 Series when I browse its content on social media				0.756
Browsing the iPhone 17 Series on social media stimulates my intention to learn more about the brand				0.730
I feel positive when browsing iPhone 17 Series content on social media				0.722
Browsing iPhone 17 Series content on social media makes me feel happy				0.669
I feel comfortable when browsing iPhone 17 Series content on social media				0.726
I spend more time browsing iPhone 17 Series content on social media compared to other brands				0.716
When opening social media, I usually also browse iPhone 17 Series content				0.685
The iPhone 17 Series is one of the brands whose content I browse most frequently on social media				0.755

ensure the correct specification of the moderation model and were not assigned separate hypotheses.

The mediation analysis indicated that CBEG significantly mediated the relationship between BLV and BDF, as the indirect effect of BLV on BDF through CBEG was significant ($\beta = 0.166$, $t = 4.214$, $P < 0.001$), supporting H4. Together with the nonsignificant direct effect of BLV on BDF, this result indicates a pattern of indirect-only mediation. However, because all variables were measured at a single point in time, the study cannot establish the temporal ordering among the constructs or confirm mediation as a causal process.

Neither the PRMF × BLV interaction (β = 0.084, t = 1.440, P = 0.150) nor the PRVF × BLV interaction (β = 0.005, t = 0.079, P = 0.937) significantly moderated the relationship between BLV and CBEG. Therefore, H5a and H5b were not supported. The indices of moderated mediation were also nonsignificant for PRMF (β = 0.038, t = 1.350, P = 0.177) and PRVF (β = 0.002, t = 0.078, P = 0.938); accordingly, H_{6a} and H_{6b} were not supported.

To visualize the interaction estimates, simple slopes were plotted for low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of PRMF and PRVF. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the slopes were similar across moderator levels, consistent with the nonsignificant interaction estimates in Table 5. Because visual separation between lines does not establish statistical moderation, interpretation should be based on the bootstrapped interaction coefficients and confidence intervals.

Table 6 summarizes explanatory power, effect sizes, and collinearity. The model accounted for 24.2% of the variance in CBEG (R^2 = 0.242) and 50.9% of the variance in BDF (R^2 = 0.509), indicating relatively low and moderate explanatory power, respectively (Hair et al., 2021). CBEG (f^2 = 0.289) and BPR (f^2 = 0.241) had medium effect sizes on BDF, whereas the effect size of BLV with BDF was negligible (f^2 = 0.001).

Table 2: Discriminant validity assessment using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Variable	BDF	BLV	BPR	CBEG	RF (PRVF)	RF (PRMF)
BDF	0.814					
BLV	0.308	0.766				
BPR	0.584	0.263	0.811			
CBEG	0.623	0.418	0.437	0.718		
RF (PRVF)	0.059	0.141	0.002	0.227	0.830	
RF (PRMF)	0.195	0.224	0.080	0.307	0.326	0.830

Table 3: Discriminant validity assessment using the Fornell-Larcker criterion

Variable	BDF	BLV	BPR	CBEG	RF (PRVF)	RF (PRMF)
BDF	0.814					
BLV	0.308	0.766				
BPR	0.584	0.263	0.811			
CBEG	0.623	0.418	0.437	0.718		
RF (PRVF)	0.059	0.141	0.002	0.227	0.830	
RF (PRMF)	0.195	0.224	0.080	0.307	0.326	0.830

Structural collinearity was evaluated using variance inflation factor (VIF). Table 6 reports VIF estimates between 1.080 and 1.407, all of which were comfortably lower than the recommended threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2021). Accordingly, no problematic collinearity was evident among the predictor relationships reported in the model.

Model-fit assessment yielded an SRMR of 0.080 (saturated model) and 0.105 (estimated model), while the NFI was 0.737. The increase in SRMR after imposing the structural restrictions suggests that the estimated model did not fully achieve satisfactory approximate fit and may contain remaining structural misspecification. Because established NFI thresholds for composite-based PLS path models remain limited, the NFI was treated as a supplementary rather than decisive criterion (Henseler et al., 2016).

Beyond the model-fit checks, the analysis also considered the model's ability to explain and predict the endogenous constructs, reflecting the prediction-focused nature of PLS-SEM. The model accounted for a moderate share of variation in BDF (R^2 = 0.509). Positive Q^2 predict values for both endogenous constructs indicated predictive relevance relative to a naïve mean benchmark. At the indicator level, prediction errors were not consistently lower than those produced by the linear-model benchmark. These results indicate that the model's predictive performance beyond the estimation sample was inconsistent across indicators (Shmueli et al., 2019). Structural VIF values below 3.0 further indicated that problematic collinearity was not evident among the specified predictor relationships. Accordingly, the structural estimates provide useful evidence regarding the proposed associations but should be interpreted cautiously in view of the remaining model-fit limitations (Table 5).

4.4. Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

As an exploratory complement to the structural analysis, an importance-performance map analysis (IPMA) was conducted for BDF (Table 6). CBEG showed the largest total association with BDF (0.447), followed by BPR (0.384) and BLV (0.187). PRMF and PRVF had higher performance values but low importance. These results identify possible managerial priorities within the estimated model, but they should not be interpreted causally and remain conditional on the model's measurement quality and overall fit.

Table 4: Hypothesis testing results

H	Variable relationship	Path coefficient (β)	Mean	Standard deviation	T-statistics	P-value	95% bias-corrected CI	Conclusion (result)
H_1	BLV→CBEG	0.372	0.376	0.059	6.271	<0.001	(0.241, 0.475)	Supported
—	PRMF→CBEG	0.201	0.202	0.046	4.381	<0.001	(0.111, 0.292)	Constituent main effect
—	PRVF→CBEG	0.114	0.115	0.044	2.602	0.009	(0.029, 0.200)	Constituent main effect
H_2	CBEG→BDF	0.447	0.451	0.060	7.492	<0.001	(0.321, 0.552)	Supported
H_3	BLV→BDF	0.021	0.020	0.050	0.415	0.678	(−0.073, 0.125)	Not supported
H_4	BLV→CBEG→BDF	0.166	0.171	0.039	4.214	<0.001	(0.092, 0.243)	Supported
H_5a	PRMF×BLV→CBEG	0.084	0.081	0.059	1.440	0.150	(1 0.036, 0.194)	Not supported
H_5b	PRVF×BLV→CBEG	0.005	0.006	0.063	0.079	0.937	(−0.120, 0.126)	Not supported
H_6a	PRMF×BLV→CBEG→BDF	0.038	0.037	0.028	1.350	0.177	(−0.015, 0.096)	Not supported
H_6b	PRVF×BLV→CBEG→BDF	0.002	0.003	0.029	0.078	0.938	(−0.054, 0.060)	Not supported
H_7	BPR→BDF	0.384	0.384	0.056	6.900	<0.001	(0.278, 0.497)	Supported

Table 5: Predictive accuracy, effect size, and collinearity assessment

Endogenous variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2 predict	Predictor variable (Path)	f^2 (effect size)	VIF
CBEG	0.242	0.231	0.197	BLV→CBEG	0.169	1.080
				PRMF→CBEG	0.045	1.180
				PRVF→CBEG	0.015	1.128
				PRMF×BLV→CBEG	0.009	1.195
				PRVF×BLV→CBEG	<0.001	1.148
BDF	0.509	0.505	0.332	CBEG→BDF	0.289	1.407
				BLV→BDF	0.001	1.223
				BPR→BDF	0.241	1.248

Table 6: Importance-performance map analysis (IPMA) results

Construct	Total effect (importance) total effect matrix	Index value (performance)
BLV	0.187	76.229
BPR	0.384	72.207
CBEG	0.447	72.570
PRVF	0.051	81.346
PRMF	0.090	78.629

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal two distinct associations with BDF: A relational pathway involving BLV and CBEG and an identity-related pathway involving BPR. BLV was positively related to CBEG, and this engagement was positively related to BDF. Although BLV had no significant direct association with BDF, its indirect association through CBEG was significant. BPR also showed a significant direct association with BDF. By contrast, PRMF and PRVF did not significantly condition either the BLV engagement association or the corresponding indirect association.

Viewed through the CBR perspective, the findings indicate that higher levels of BLV correspond with greater CBEG. Strong emotional attachment to a brand may prompt consumers to devote more cognitive attention, affective involvement, and behavioral effort in brand-related interactions. BLV may provide an affective foundation that motivates consumers to follow brand-related information, interact with brand content, and maintain an active relationship with the brand (Gómez-Suárez, 2019). This finding is consistent with Chou and Chen (2025), who positioned BLV as an affective antecedent of CBEG.

CBEG was also positively associated with BDF. Engagement reflects consumers' active involvement in brand-related interactions rather than merely favorable evaluations of a brand. Consumers who actively follow and process brand-related content may be better prepared and more willing to respond when the brand is criticized, clarify product-related concerns, or challenge unfavorable claims. This interpretation is in line with prior evidence indicating that engagement-related behavior contributes to consumers' willingness to defend a brand (Chou and Chen, 2025; Sawaftah et al., 2021).

The nonsignificant direct association between BLV and BDF, combined with the significant indirect association through CBEG,

Figure 2: Simple slope analysis of the moderating effect of PRMF on the relationship between BLV and CBEG

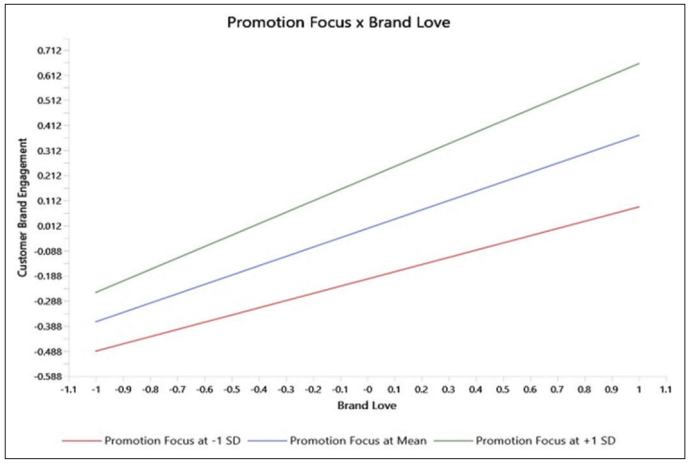
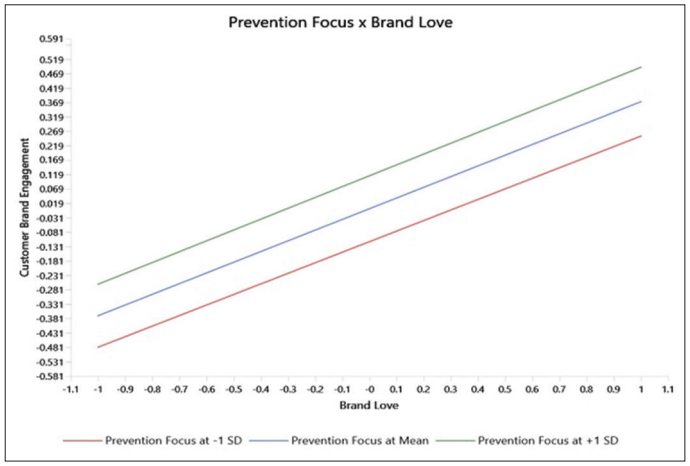


Figure 3: Simple slope analysis of the moderating effect of PRVF on the relationship between BLV and CBEG



supports a pattern of indirect-only mediation. This result indicates that emotional attachment by itself may be insufficient to generate defensive responses. Unlike loyalty or positive word of mouth, BDF arises specifically when a brand is criticized or challenged. BLV may create relational potential, but CBEG appears to connect that emotional attachment with consumers' reported willingness to protect the brand. The finding therefore distinguishes feeling positively attached to a brand from actively responding on its behalf.

BPR provided a separate identity-related explanation of BDF. Unlike BLV, which primarily represents affection toward a brand,

BPR reflects positive self-evaluation arising from association with the focal product family. The positive relationship between BPR and BDF aligns with the possibility that criticism of an identity-relevant product may be experienced as a symbolic challenge to consumers' self-image. Defending the product may consequently help consumers maintain a favorable view of themselves and preserve their connection to the brand (Cheng et al., 2012; Wiese et al., 2026). However, because BPR was modeled only as a direct predictor, it should not be interpreted as a second mediated pathway. Moreover, the cross-sectional data do not establish that a perceived self-threat caused the reported defensive responses.

The nonsignificant moderating effects of PRMF and PRVF differ from the findings of Chou and Chen (2025). This divergence may reflect contextual differences between the studies, but measurement-related explanations should also be considered. Six regulatory-focus indicators were removed following the pilot study, which may have narrowed the conceptual coverage of the two orientations and reduced variation in the resulting construct scores. In addition, PRMF and PRVF represented general chronic motivational orientations, whereas CBEG was measured in relation to social-media content concerning a specific product family. This difference in the level of abstraction may have weakened the interactions. Although cultural and symbolic-consumption explanations remain plausible, they were not directly examined and therefore cannot be confirmed from the present data.

Overall, the results distinguish emotional attachment, active relational involvement, and identity-related pride as conceptually different elements associated with BDF. BLV was associated with BDF through CBEG, whereas BPR accounted for a separate direct association. RF was not supported as a boundary condition in this context. Given the use of cross-sectional, self-reported data, these findings should be interpreted cautiously. Further caution is warranted because the estimated model did not attain fully satisfactory approximate fit, and its out-of-sample predictive performance varied across indicators.

5.2. Theoretical Implication

By clarifying the process that links BLV with BDF, this study extends CBR Theory. Previous research has commonly shown that BLV contributes to various favorable brand-related outcomes. These findings suggest that BLV alone may be insufficient to generate BDF as a behavioral outcome. Instead, CBEG provides a relational pathway through which emotional attachment is connected with consumers' brand-defending behavior. This distinction extends the CBR perspective from the existence of emotional bonds to the process through which those bonds become behaviorally relevant when a brand faces criticism.

The BDF framework is further extended through the inclusion of BPR as a complementary identity-related predictor. BLV and BPR were associated with BDF through different patterns: BLV operated indirectly through CBEG, whereas BPR showed a direct association. This distinction suggests that BDF may arise from both relational involvement and identity-related self-evaluation. The inclusion of BPR therefore broadens the explanation of BDF beyond affection and engagement without treating pride as another component of the BLV pathway.

Finally, the nonsignificant interaction effects qualify the proposed role of RF as a boundary condition. The findings do not invalidate RFT but indicate that chronic PRMF and PRVF may not consistently alter the relationship between BLV and product-specific engagement across settings. Their moderating role may depend on measurement breadth, alignment between motivational orientation and engagement context, or other contextual conditions. Consequently, the study contributes by identifying both the explanatory value and the empirical limits of extending the original BDF framework to Indonesian iPhone 17 Series users.

5.3. Practical Implications

The findings indicate that managers should avoid assuming that consumers with strong affection for a brand will automatically defend it when it faces criticism. In this study, BLV was associated with BDF primarily through CBEG. Managers should therefore create credible and constructive opportunities for consumers to interact with product-related information, exchange experiences, and develop sufficient knowledge to respond thoughtfully to brand-related criticism.

The exploratory IPMA results reinforce the managerial relevance of CBEG and BPR. CBEG showed the highest importance for BDF, with a total effect of 0.447 and a performance value of 72.570, followed by BPR, with an importance value of 0.384 and a performance value of 72.207. BLV showed lower importance at 0.187, while PRMF and PRVF had relatively limited importance values of 0.090 and 0.051. Within the estimated model, CBEG and BPR therefore represent the most relevant areas for managerial attention.

Potential engagement initiatives include interactive product education, responsive post-purchase communication, moderated online user communities, transparent responses to product concerns, and opportunities for consumers to contribute credible user-generated content. Because the CBEG measure focused primarily on social-media content, the findings most directly support digital engagement strategies rather than broader offline initiatives. These activities should foster informed participation and constructive advocacy rather than encourage unconditional defense or hostility toward legitimate criticism.

BPR may be strengthened through communication that connects product ownership with creativity, confidence, personal accomplishment, and authentic self-expression. However, managers should avoid developing pride primarily through superiority, exclusivity, or unfavorable comparisons with other consumers. Identity-related branding is more sustainable when it helps consumers express meaningful aspects of themselves without encouraging exclusionary or antagonistic behavior.

Finally, the nonsignificant interaction effects provide little support for using PRMF and PRVF as the primary bases for segmenting engagement strategies in this context. Broader strategies

emphasizing relationship quality, credibility, identity relevance, and transparent communication may be more appropriate. Because the recommendations are derived from cross-sectional associations and exploratory IPMA results, their effectiveness should be evaluated through subsequent consumer research, field experiments, or campaign-level performance assessments.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how BLV, CBEG, BPR, and RF were associated with self-reported BDF among Indonesian consumers who owned and used an iPhone 17 Series device. BLV was positively associated with engagement, which was positively associated with BDF. The direct BLV-BDF association was nonsignificant, whereas the indirect association through engagement was significant. BPR showed an additional positive direct association with BDF. PRMF and PRVF did not significantly condition the first stage or the indirect association.

Theoretically, the results align with a mediated relational association from BLV through engagement and with a separate identity-related association between BPR and BDF. The findings do not, however, establish that engagement or self-threat causally produces BDF. From a managerial perspective, the exploratory IPMA identifies CBEG and BPR as the most important predictors within the estimated model, but interventions based on these results require validation through longitudinal or experimental research.

The conclusions drawn from these results should be considered within the methodological boundaries of the study. First, this research relied on cross-sectional data, making it impossible to determine the temporal sequence among the variables or establish causal relationships. Second, all constructs were self-reported in a single questionnaire, so common method bias and discrepancies between intentions and actual defensive behavior cannot be ruled out. Third, purposive online sampling and the concentration of respondents among younger consumers and students limit population generalizability. Fourth, the sample pooled owners of different iPhone 17 models even though release timing and product positioning varied across models. Fifth, the survey did not measure awareness of or exposure to the product criticism used to motivate the study. Sixth, removing six RF items may have narrowed the constructs and reduced comparability with the original study. Finally, the estimated model did not demonstrate satisfactory global fit, and the predictive assessment beyond the estimation sample produced mixed results.

Subsequent research is encouraged to employ longitudinal or experimental approaches to clarify the sequence of relationships among the study variables and examine responses to standardized negative brand information. Behavioral measures of online engagement, advocacy, and defensive responses could complement self-reports. Studies should also examine whether CBEG is better represented as a higher-order construct with cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, retain broader validated measures of PRMF and PRVF, and test measurement invariance across languages and contexts. Comparative research across brands, device models, product categories, and cultures would help determine the extent to which these relationships are generalizable across different contexts.

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