Importance of Customer Perceived Value in Restaurant Businesses: Influence of Brand Experience on Brand Strength and Electronic Word of Mouth

Hafiz Ihsan Ur Rehman*, Urva Zainab**, Hafiz Kashif Iqbal***, Muhammad Amir****

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to empirically examine the relationship between brand experience, brand strength, and electronic word of mouth along with mediating role of perceived brand value. A total of 308 responses were generated, using an electronic questionnaire. The data was deductively analyzed using reliability, validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modelling (SEM). The results of this study indicate that brand experiences positively influence brand strength and electronic word of mouth. Moreover, the results revealed the partial mediation of customer perceived value in the relationship of brand experience and brand strength and also in the relationship between brand experience and electronic word of mouth. This study explains how restaurants can create electronic word of mouth and increased brand strength through memorable experiences. This study provides insight beyond marketing mix elements, and add theatrical elements which provide evidence for positive customer value perception increased brand strength and widely generated word of mouth. The theatrical elements of serving food studied in this research have not been studied before in the context of Pakistani restaurants. Therefore, this study bridges the gap between previous studies.

Keywords*: Brand experience, Customer perceived value, Brand strength, Electronic word-of-mouth, Pakistan.

JEL Classification: M31, M39

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*Lecturer, Department of Business Administration, University of the Punjab, Gujranwala Campus, Pakistan Email: h.ihsan@pugc.edu.pk

**PhD Scholar, Department of Business Administration, University of the Punjab, Gujranwala Campus, Pakistan. Email: urvazainab1@gmail.com

***Lecturer, Department of Commerce, University of the Punjab, Gujranwala Campus, Pakistan. Email: Kashif.09@hotmail.com

****Scholar, Department of Commerce, University of the Punjab, Gujranwala Campus. Email: ma.arain824@gmail.com

1.   Introduction

Stories, theater, and plays are all part of the world we live in. However, when these elements of theater and grandeur experiences are brought to traditional services and products, it makes a bold statement. From live cooking to having an ice cream made in front of you in midst of misty nitrogen clouds. From unicorn and rainbow food to lighting a chicken on fire for entertainment purposes. The restaurant industry has sufficiently surpassed the other sectors in terms of engaging and interacting with the consumer. Now, when we visit a restaurant, we see a themed ambience, in which everything from music to lights to decoration, resonates with each other. And in terms of food, restaurants today, are coming up with innovative ways to produce a buzz in consumers. Some of them offer live cooking with trained professionals cooking for them. Like in a Japanese-style steakhouse, the food is prepared tableside for the consumers all the while, the consumers can engage in conversation with him, and meanwhile, he does some entertaining acts as well (Babin & James, 2010). All these activities are done in the name of creating a memorable experience. This resonates with the fact the consumers today do not just want to have a product or service but rather they are looking for memorable experiences (Choi et al., 2018; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). These over-the-top experiences will be termed as 'theatrics' in this study. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'theatrics' as dramatic performances intended to attract attention(Webster). This very definition becomes the basis of this research. So, these 'theatrical experiences' fall under experiential marketing. Experiential marketing is undertaken to provide consumers with memorable experiences thus, building brand experiences (Fiore, 2010). Researchers have discussed the importance of experiential marketing (Lanier Jr & Hampton, 2016; Pine et al., 1999; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) generally as well in the context of restaurants. In fact, according to Morgan et al. (2010) theatrics have been used in the dining industry since medieval times and today as well they are utilized more in the terms of aesthetics. These brand experiences are a part of the whole interaction between the brand and the consumer. Brand experiences are the responses (either emotional, behavioral or psychological) that are generated due to unique features of a brand (Brakus et al., 2009). Now, it can be said that for every individual the responses can be different as each person has different reactions to different situations. These reactions have a way of reaching the general public through word of mouth (WOM) communication. After the establishment of the worth of traditional WOM, online platforms gave rise to electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Indulging in eWOM entails that existing or potential consumers are electronically commenting (either positively or negatively) about the services, products of a brand. This form of communication is rather vital (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003), in fact, it is considered to be more powerful than traditional marketing activities (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018) as it has the power to sway the opinion of potential customers and can have an impact on the purchase decisions of consumers. So, based on these important factors and the role of the brand experience, in the formation of positive electronic word of mouth of the customer and strengthening the brand, different brand experiences including the sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual brand experience are considered in this study. And the

major objectives of this study include finding out the impacts of sensory, affective, behavior and intellectual brand experience on the electronic word of mouth of the customers and the brand strength. Moreover, as there is a very significant role of customer perceived value between brand experience, customer electronic word of mouth and brand strength, so, customer perceived value has been taken as a mediator between brand experience the electronic word of mouth and brand strength.

Positive EWOM entails that consumers develop a perception of the value of a brand. The term value has been in the literature for decades and is still considered imperative to gain a competitive advantage (Martelo Landroguez et al., 2011). The customer value perception domain discusses the give vs get debate. That is, it explains what the customer is perceiving he would get (the benefit) as opposed to what he gives (sacrifices) to obtain it. Customer perceived value (CPV) is said to be an antecedent to consumer purchase decisions that is consumers are more likely to buy a product or service that they consider of high value (Dodds & Monroe, 1985; Ebrahim, 2020). Other than creating value for consumers, brands pay particular attention to increase their brand strength. Brand strength is the set of associations and preferences that the consumer has for a brand(Shocker et al., 1994). These associations create a sense of loyalty for the brand that translates into repurchase behavior and recommendation intentions. Without measuring how the brand is performing with the consumer, it would be hard for any brand to pave the path there are on. Thus, this study attempts to link all the above-stated variables in the context of Pakistani restaurants. This sector has its benefits in the economy as people have a basic need of having food and most of them now want to eat out. People going to restaurants not only have the urge to eat and have tasty food but rather they are derived by their urges to have a wonderful experience and to socialize with others (Ibrahimi & Mansouri, 2013).

This study is significantly focusing on different brand experiences that are all important in the formation of positive electronic word of mouth and enhancement of the brand strength positively, these dimensions and factors also significantly contribute to the enhancement of positive customer perceived value by the brand. So, the study will be theoretically significant for enhancing data and knowledge regarding different brand experience dimensions when it comes to the enhancement of the customer perceived value, brand strength and positive electronic word of mouth. The analysis and results of the study are also significant and usable by the brands that strive for enhancing customer perceived value and positive brand strength. Moreover, socially and electronically weak brands can also inspire from the results of this study to improve the sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual brand experiences for the customers, to enhance the positive word of mouth by the customers. Wiedmann et al. (2018) Conducted a similar study in which he studied multi-sensory brand experiences in the context of luxury truism and found out positive relation between experiences and brand strength. In his study, however, eWOM generation was not covered and remained a gap. In a study by Pham et al. (2016), it was concluded that customers perceived

value matters in developing loyalty in restaurants, however, they suggested that restaurants need to create certain characteristics, like the taste, attitude, and quality, to attract customers and build an image and this was lacking in their study (Ebrahim, 2020). Since the studies in the past were insufficient to link brand experience, CPV, eWOM, and brand strength, this research is conducted to demonstrate the interplay of these dimensions. Furthermore, researchers in the past have not worked on the concept of theatrics and are rather a novel concept. Since the inception of social media sites, this form of experience blew all over the world as well in Pakistan. But no one has discussed the importance of providing these theatrical experiences and whether they drive the consumer to post about it. Moreover, research is needed in this context to gain an insight into the value perception of consumers in the context of restaurants; and how restaurants can create brand strength. Thus, this study aims to provide an insight into theatrical experiences happening in Pakistani restaurants. Moreover, this study attempts to understand the power of brand experiences, and how they can generate brand strength and e-WOM.

2.   Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Consumers these days want to indulge in experiences creating lifelong memories. The result of a study concluded that consumers build mental associations with the brand in their minds to give it meaning (Joyce, 1963; Keller, 1993). In this same study, it was revealed that positive or negative perceptions and associations with a consumer can build lasting customer equity, hence increasing brand strength (Joyce, 1963; Keller, 1993). This theory is the base of the current study and adds e-WOM to expand it further. However, this theory presented only marketing mix elements as a basis of creating a mental association with consumers and lacks the newly found theatrical elements. These over-the-top gestures are crucial for creating a buzz in the market through electronic Word of Mouth. Which is also the focus of the parent theory. Therefore, this study attempts to enhance the theory in today's digital context.

2.1   *Experience marketing strategy theory*

The experience marketing theory focuses on the capitalization of the brands on the electronic word of mouth for creating experiences that induce positive outcomes and word of mouth for the brand through the brand users (Qiao et al., 2019). With the enhancement of social media usage, this theory has become more relevant in the practice, and it is now being more relevantly applied for the enhancement of positive and significant brand experience for the customers and the potential consumers of the brand. It has been observed by different researchers that people significantly use Facebook, Snap chat, Twitter and above all Instagram to share their experiences with different brands, which significantly and directly implies that electronic word of mouth is very important for creating positive and significant brand experiences, and brand experiences in return impact the electronic word of mouth positively and

significantly, that enhances the strength of the brand (Diana-Gabriela, 2015). Creation of the experiences that makes the customers or the consumers of the brand loyal to the brand results in strengthening of the brand with respect to its customer base and also play a significant role in the attraction of new customers towards the brand. Moreover, this also significantly and positively enhances the positive word of mouth of the brand, which is now travelling even faster with the help of the emergence and enhancement of the electronic word of mouth of the consumers (You et al., 2015).

According to the study of (Mihardjo et al., 2019), consumers are now vigilant in sharing the opinions and information regarding brand experiences directly on social media platforms, these opinions and experiences are observed to be directly and significantly drive the buyers towards or away from the brand, its services, or its products. Brand endorsements by celebrities are observed to be enhancing sales for different brands enormously and at the same time, bad reviews and bad brand experiences are analyzed to be playing a significant role in decreasing the sales and reputation of the companies negatively in a rapid way (Al-mohaimmeed, 2020). On the other hand, consumers are analyzed to be performing their full homework as well, in the form of doing proper market research before purchasing any product or service from a specific brand and consumers are looking for information related to any product or service before availing it. These factors also point towards the importance of electronic word of mouth and brand experience, both of these concepts are significantly focused by the experience marketing strategy, which focuses on creating positively significant brand experiences for the customers so that customers can be made loyal while attracting the potential customers as well (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009).

2.2   *Brand Experience and Brand Strength*

Brand experience is sought after today as a customer now wants more than just a physical product but rather a memorable brand experience (Shaw & Ivens, 2002). Memorable experiences constitute intellectual, physical, interactive, and temporal elements of the offerings that engage the consumers. The experiences should be well combined to instigate the pleasure of membership, which is a requirement for brand loyalty (Fiore, 2010). It has been derived from the literature that brand loyalty, brand value, and brand equity or customer-based brand equity is synonymous with the word "brand strength" as they all, roughly, mean the associations of the consumer with the brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Feldwick, 1996; Wood, 2000). Experiential marketing is thus, used to engage the consumers emotionally to develop their loyalty with the consumers (Carù & Cova, 2008). Similarly, different authors have claimed that positive brand experiences are the key to creating brand strength (Brakus et al., 2009; Fiore, 2010; Verhoef et al., 2009). Experiences, generate memories and are often linked with customer satisfaction, thereby they act as an antecedent to create brand loyalty, i.e. brand strength (Chen & Lee, 2009; Pratminingsih et al., 2018). According to the theory of experience marketing, it is clear that whenever the customer is trying to have a

good bond with the brand he likes, he will experience the brand again and again and if the customer finds the desired value in the brand then he will make sure the positive word of mouth on the different platforms of the social media (Adel et al., 2020). This will enhance the brand strength as well because the brand experiences must be appropriate for achieving better brand strengths (Chylinski et al., 2020). Unique and memorable experiences provide superior value to consumers and form a base of repurchase intentions and consumer strength especially in the hospitality industry (Cetin & Dincer, 2014; Pine et al., 1999). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Biedenbach and Marell (2010) it was concluded that brand experience has a relation with every dimension of brand equity, that is, brand associations, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Moreover, it is said that unique experiences can be utilized by managers to create strong brands (Mukerjee, 2018), (Punjaisri et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2020). However, in another study by Shamim and Mohsin (2013) it was identified that customer experiences have a week direct effect on brand experiences whereas brand credibility strengthens the relationship between the two variables. There is strong implication of the brand experience strategy over here, as it focuses on the capitalization of the brands on the electronic word of mouth for the purpose of creation of experiences that induce positive outcomes and word of mouth for the brand through the brand users. This strategy can be applied significantly for the positive outcomes related with the brand experience of the customers, positively and significantly impacting the strength of the brand as well. Nevertheless, studying the extensive literature it is proposed that:

H1: Brand experience has a significant positive impact on brand strength

2.3   *Brand Experience and Electronic Word of Mouth*

EWOM communication is considered influential when making any purchase decision, especially in the services and hospitality industry because intangible products are difficult to evaluate (Litvin et al., 2008). Experience dimensions like, physical environment, and social interaction is said to influence brand strength as well as recommendations behavior(Cetin & Dincer, 2014). When brands are engaging and use experiential marketing they increase the intentions of WOM communications (Zhang et al., 2017). When firms generate positive emotions in consumers by creating a memorable experience they generate WOM intentions (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). In the hospitality industry experiences of consumers drive them to revisit a restaurant or a hotel and then recommend it to others as well (Walls et al., 2011). Customer satisfaction has been previously linked with eWOM generation, however, in today's context this is not considered sufficient; consumers want a special experience only then they can be perused to write positive comments using online platforms, thus increasing the likelihood of positive eWOM generation. Various studies consider brand experience as the antecedent of word-of-mouth generation (Barnes et al., 2014; Beckman et al., 2013). In another study by Khan and Fatma (2017) it was established that brand experience is a stronger predictor of WOM than customer satisfaction. Consumers learn from their

experiences, therefore, when they have a positive experience with a restaurant they are more likely to talk about and write positive reviews whereas, negative reviews will lead consumers to avoid such restaurants (Voight, 2007).

The experience marketing strategy enables the users of the products to make their reviews or provide feedback about the product after using the products, so the positive brand experience can be revealed by the consumers if they find what they were looking for and what they were actually wanted by the brand (Gao, 2018). If the brand is successful in giving a unique experience, then the positive electronic word of mouth is easy to capture by the consumers of the brands. So, this theory is significantly implicating in the brand experience and E-WOM (Kerguignas, 2020). Mukerjee (2018) Also deduced results from his study that brand experience has a significant impact on WOM recommendations. Consumers prefer a long term relationship with the brands, and for this reason, a brand that engages consumers in interactive experiences makes the consumers grateful and develop trust, in turn, grateful consumers write positive reviews and engage in positive eWOM (D. Raggio et al., 2014).Fou (2008) however, criticized marketers that try to influence eWOM instead he recommends that eWOM is something that happens naturally and restaurants should be encouraged to provide such services that create memorable experiences and that can be stored in consumer's memories which, they will automatically write about on social media sites. The basic definition of eWOM entails the fact that present, former or potential consumers write about their positive, negative, or neutral experiences regarding products, services, firms or brands, via the internet that is available to a large sum of people (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). The experience marketing strategy also focuses on the enhancement of brand experience by the customers positively with the help of positive word of mouth regarding the brand. According to the studies of Zhang et al. (2017), (Punjaisri et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2020) there is a significant and positive relationship between positive electronic word of mouth and positive brand experience of the customers. Moreover, various studies have also implicated the experience marketing strategy for the establishment of a positive and significant relationship between positive electronic word of mouth and positive brand experience of the customers. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Brand experience has a significant positive impact on electronic word of mouth

2.4   *Brand Experience and Customer Perceived Value*

Experiences are stored in consumer memories, and therefore have the power to generate certain behavioral outcomes (Brakus et al., 2009; Holbrook, 2006; Nysveen et al., 2013) thus, Brand experiences are important to create value for the consumer (Wiedmann et al., 2018) as they satisfy the demand of consumers to indulge in pleasurable experiences. Brand experiences that involve emotional stimulation can lead to increased customer perceived value and affect consumer decision-making and behavior(Wiedmann et al., 2013).

Experiences created by firms leave strong imprints and distinguish the brand from its competitors thus resulting in a unique value that in turn drives, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and recommendation behaviors (Cetin & Dincer, 2014; Pine et al., 1999). Experiences are exceptional and personal and they include perceptions of consumers and have the ability to emotionally engage the consumer, thus just like products or services, experiences also influence customers' value perception (Walls et al., 2011). CPV is strongly related to the self-identity of the consumers, therefore, individual value perceptions are generated from customers' own positive and pleasurable experiences (Holbrook, 2006). Experience marketing strategy is proved out to be beneficial for the service sector as well, as it gives the ideas to the scholars and public that good experience can significantly enhance the customer perceived value and brand experience as well as they both are linked with each other (Komiya & Nakamura, 2019) (Li et al., 2021). In a service-based economy, especially, it is vital to note that experiences are the source of competitive advantage, and such distinct intangible assets are a major hub for creating superior value perception for consumers(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) as well, intangible assets are gaining popularity and activities are directed for the co-creation of value, they further state that the world is moving from tangible assets and moving into the realm of intangibility i.e. towards resources that create effects. It is a defined fact that positive brand experience can result in positive perceived value by the customers, which again signifies towards the experience marketing strategy that involves significant focus on providing the customers with value loaded and positive experiences, for strengthening the brand and maximizing the value of the brand experience. The theory imposes that significantly positive brand experiences result in enhanced positive experiences by the customers, resulting in positive and significantly perceived value by the customers. Thus, it is deduced from the literature that:

H3: Brand experience has a significant positive impact on customer perceived value.

2.5   *Customer Perceived Value and Brand Strength*

It has been established in the literature that CPV is a key driver of customer loyalty (Yang & Peterson, 2004). Customers are prone to commit to an organization if they perceive, that they are getting superior value from the brand (McKee et al., 2006). Customer perceived value aids in distinguishing a brand from its competitors and develops superior brand strength, in a study, it was noted that brands should create unique value to influence brand loyalty (brand strength) (Wiedmann et al., 2018) . Moreover, CPV is not only essential in repurchase stages, when customers are trying to buy a product or service, rather perceived value is also important in the post-purchase stage, impacting consumer's loyalty behaviors (Dodds & Monroe, 1985; Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000; Petrick, 2002). It is also proposed that CPV is the foundation of true customer loyalty and that brand strength stems from CPV (Chiou, 2004; Zauner et al., 2015). With respect to the theory of experience marketing strategy, it is feasible that the positive experience of the consumer after using the product can cause

benefits to the brand equity and it can also be proved beneficial for the attraction of a larger customer base because the good experiences of the people in online shopping and other types of buying and selling have caused significant impacts on the Customer value and brand strengths (Liu & Sun, 2020) (Zhang & Xu, 2018). The conception and conservation of superior CPV are intensely related to loyalty, satisfaction, and trust of consumers (Bakanauskas & Jakutis, 2010) "the translation of the customers' value perception into a holistic experience of innovative design, precious materials, excellent workmanship, and exceptional service significantly enhance brand perception and brand-related behavior" (Wiedmann et al., 2018). These thus, developed brand associations and awareness of consumers demonstrates as brand strength. On the other hand, brand loyalty has an effect on the perceived value as well (Pham et al., 2016). This means both the variables have an interchangeable relation and have an impact on each other. Brand experiences, customer perceived value and brand strength are all interrelated factors that impact each other, slight positive variance in one factor can cause significant positive variance in the other factor. It is imposed by the experience marketing strategies that brands must provide the customers with positively significant value-added experiences, that will result in positive electronic word of mouth by the customers, regarding the perceived value by the customers. Positive and significant customer perceived value does not only make the customers loyal and improves the image of the brand but also significantly and positively impacts the brand strength. The brand strength is enhanced with the enhancement of the number of loyal customers and attached advocates of the brand, as a result of positive and significant customer perceived value. Thus, it is proposed that:

H4: Customer perceived value has a significant positive impact on brand strength.

2.6   *Customer Perceived Value and Electronic Word of Mouth*

Strong value creation by the brands can result in enhanced word-of-mouth campaigns (Oluwafemi & Dastane, 2016). According to Babin and James (2010) it was proposed that customer service value influences the intention to spread positive WOM. CPV is composed of giving and get values, and as the price is said to be the give component it is said that CPV influences intention to spread WOM (De Matos & Rossi, 2008). In emerging marketing perceived value plays a vital role in developing positive WOM intentions (Mukerjee, 2018). Perceived value leads to purchase intention as well as generation of eWOM (Kamtarin, 2012). Moreover, according to the theory of experience marketing, it is definite that the positive word of mouth can be enhanced through the deliverance of good value by the brands as the good experience of the customer about the brand is a key to maintain the positive word of mouth about the brand (Ma & Zhao, 2019). In the case of restaurants, customers like to compare their perceived dining experiences with actual dining experiences (Longart, 2010). These comparisons can place via the use of the internet, by reading reviews, feedbacks, and blogging sites. According to another perspective, word-of-mouth campaigns affect the perceived value of dining experiences (Oluwafemi & Dastane, 2016). Thereby making the

relation interchangeable. Both the constructs affect each other. There is a significant role of customer perceived value in the formation of the electronic word of mouth or the word of mouth of the customers regarding a brand, and customer perceived value is significantly impacted by the brand experience. Experience marketing strategy imposes that customer brand experiences will result in positive word of mouth and positive and significant perceived value by the customers, only if the brand experiences positively impact the opinion of the customers. That is why the theory focuses on providing the customers with positive and significant brand experiences resulting in positive word of mouth and customer perceived value, enhancing the image of the brand positively and also significantly and positively enhancing the strength of the brand. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Customer perceived value has a significant positive impact on word of mouth.

2.7   *Mediation Effect of Customer Perceived Value*

With relevance to the proposed theory of experience marketing strategy, which implies that the customers must contain the positive and good experience about the brand and values offered by the product, the scholars have proposed that only this way the customers can recommend the product or brand to further individuals and in this way the customer base of the company can be enhanced (İpek, 2020). Moreover, it is also clear that better brand experiences have led towards the better customer perceived value, as it gives the paths to remain on the unique line and on the way to provide the products with a better experience and better value to the customers (Deng et al., 2020). The factors of brand experience, brand strength, customer perceived value and word of mouth are varied in different ways, providing the brand with its desired outcomes and significant results, however, as it is imposed by the experience marketing theory that, there is a significant need of providing the customers with positive and significant brand experience, so it brings down the accumulative brand efforts to the brand experience of the customers. Since the relationship between CPV and brand experience; CPV and brand strength as well the relations of CPV with eWOM is established through an extensive review of the literature it is proposed that:

H6: Customer perceived value mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand strength.

H7: Customer perceived value mediates the relationship between brand experience and word of mouth.

2.8   *Theoretical Framework*

A review of the literature yielded many studies that cater to the variables under study. However, there was no study that could identify the effect of relationships between all the variables. Therefore, a conceptual model is proposed.
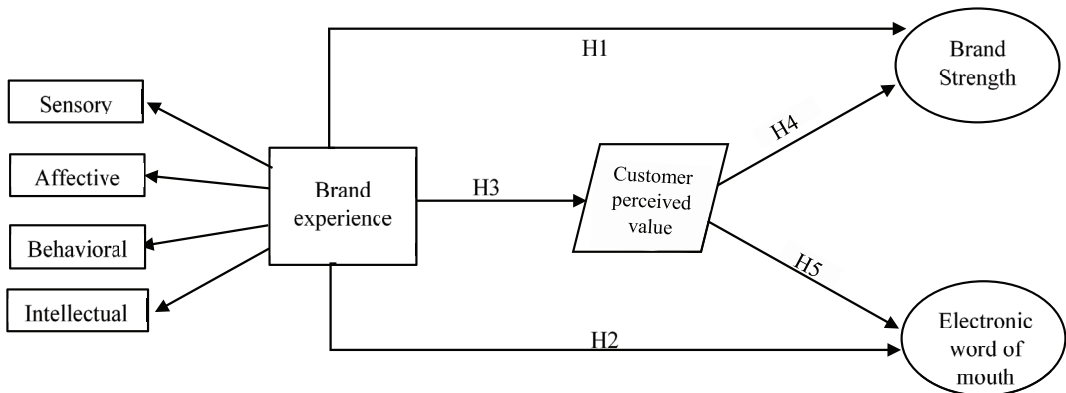
Figure1: Research Model

3.   Methodology

This empirical study is based on experiences formed in Pakistani restaurants, which have not been previously studied. This study revolves around customer experiences related to certain restaurants and requires only the data for a specific point of time, as the trends keep evolving and experiences change so there is no need to conduct before and after analysis of their experiences. For this reason, this study is cross-sectional in nature. The sample size has members of both genders having different age groups that range from 15 to 60. As well, a sample of various educational backgrounds is considered. The characteristics of the sample are decided based on the population. As people in Pakistan tend to have family and friends gathering in restaurants where they undergo various experiences. These people belong to different ages, groups, genders, and educational backgrounds

The sampling technique used is convenience sampling because limited time was given to undertake the study. The sample size is calculated by using the formula given by Kline (2014). According to this formula, the items of the questionnaire are multiplied by 10. As, the total items in the questionnaire are 340, thus according to the formula 340 *10= 340, which means the sample size is 340. However, a total of 308 responses were received which are still deemed enough to provide conclusive results. This research utilized structured questionnaires that are filled by respondents over the internet, using various social media sites; like, Instagram, Facebook, and Whatsapp.

3.1   *Research Instrument and Measures*

The questionnaire consists of a total of 34 items. 3 items are related to the demographics of the respondent. A question is asked related to the experience of respondents with the 'viral foods' to know if they had any memorable experience. This question is important in terms of linking all the variables as well as justifying those theatrics that exists in restaurants and

respondents who are aware of them. 12 items related to brand experience the scale for this adapted from (Brakus et al., 2009). 8 items are asked for the mediator, CVP, its scale is adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2018) study. Particularly the question from their CVP dimensions are taken, as these were the only related to the definition and concept of CVP utilized in this research. Brand strength is measured with 5 items, by adapting the scale of Wiedmann et al. (2018). The scale for eWOM is adapted from (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018) and includes 5 items. SPSS 20 is used to conduct different screening tests including reliability analysis and Cronbach's alpha. Apart from this software, AMOS is used for testing the mediation effects of CPV and for conducting SEM and path analysis.

4.   Analysis and Results

A descriptive analysis using IBM SPSS was run to know about the frequencies and percentages of each category of demographics for the respondents. Table 1 shows the respective percentages of the respondents.

Table 1
Respondent's demographics

Demographics	%
Gender	
Male	28.9
Female	71.1
Total	100.0
Age	
15-20	10.1
21-30	77.3
31-40	5.5
41-50	5.2
51-60	1.9
Total	100.0
Education	
less than intermediate	1.0
Intermediate	6.2
Bachelors	56.8
Masters/MPhil	34.4
PhD	1.6
Total	100.0

Another question was asked after the major demographics section, which related to specific foods experienced in the restaurants these foods were trending on Instagram at one time or another.

This question distinguished the target respondents from the non-target respondents as only those respondents were needed that had experienced those viral foods. Respondents were asked to choose from a list of options, and they could choose any number of items that they had experienced. The choice was given to know about the popularity of these foods in Pakistan's food market. The fig below shows which foods were particularly popular among the respondents.
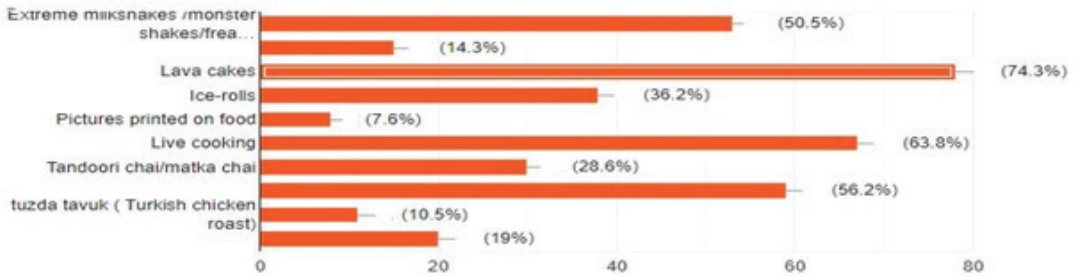

Figure 2: Foods Experienced

4.1   *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics is performed to check any discrepancies in the data. Table 5 presents all values related to mean, standard deviation, and skewness. As well as contains minimum and maximum values of the data. The minimum and maximum values are within the scale given that were 1-5. And the values fall between them.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
BE	1.00	4.83	3.76	.50	-1.21
CVP	1.00	5.00	3.98	.61	-1.31
BS	1.00	5.00	3.96	.59	-1.32
EWOM	1.00	5.00	3.69	.79	-1.28

Note: (BS= brand strength, BE= brand experience, CVP= customer perceived value, and eWOM= electronic word of mouth.)

The mean values for BE, CVP, BS, and eWOM are 3.76, 3.98, 3.96, and 3.69 respectively. As far as the standard deviation is concerned, it deals with the dispersion of variances along with the data set. The threshold value of this is between +1 and -1. And the values are well within this range. Standard deviation and skewness represent the normality of the data.

Skewness shows if the data is normal and bell-shaped. The negative values indicate that the data is negatively skewed meaning that the tail is on the left side, For the threshold values, -2 and +2 values can be acceptable (George & Mallery, 2016). For the current data set, the values are within the threshold values with the tail on the left side of the distribution.

4.2   Validity and Reliability

The reliability in this study is tested by computing Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Convergent validity is measured to make sure that the constructs are correlated with each other for the variable they are supposed to measure (Netemeyer et al., 2003). Convergent validity is assessed by the values of loading and average variance accepted (AVE). As for measuring the reliability of the data, the value of Cronbach's alpha, as well as composite reliabilities of the constructs, are required.

Table 3
Convergent Validity

| Variables | Items | Reliability | | Convergent Validity |
		Cronbach alpha (α)	Composite Reliabilities (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
BE	12	.877	0.870	0.561
CVP	8	.918	0.919	0.586
BS	5	.880	0.885	0.608
EWOM	5	.893	0.885	0.608

Note: BS= brand strength, BE= brand experience, CVP= customer perceived value, and eWOM= electronic word of mouth.

The value of Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0 to 1 and the rule of thumb is that the value should be greater than 0.7 for the data to be reliable. A value more than 0.7 is considered to be more significant and indicates the internal consistency of the data (Pallant, 2004). The test results show that the value of Cronbach's alpha for BE, CVP, BS, and eWOM is 0.877, 0.918, 0.880, and 0.893 respectively. These values specifically indicate that the data is reliable and future researchers can use the same scales to conduct their analysis. For measuring convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) is measured. AVE is a measure that explains how much variance is explained by each of the variables. For this, the threshold value given is 0.5. Values greater than 0.5 are considered satisfactory but no ideal and indicate a valid scale (Joseph et al., 2010). The values for AVE are 0.561, 0.586, 0.608, and 0.608 for the variables, BE, CVP, BS, and eWOM respectively. This means the value surpasses the threshold value of 0.5 and is considered satisfactory, indicated that convergent validity exists in the model. Thus, the scale proved to be reliable as well as valid.

4.3   Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using the statistical tool Amos. It is a type of measurement model that identifies the fit of the constructs under study with the latent variables. The results of the CFA are shown in table 4.

Table 4
Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Model fit indices	Observed values	Criteria
CMIN	1289.3	Less is better
Df	389	-
CMIN/df	3.31	<2 = ideal, 2- 5 acceptable**
IFI	0.93	≥ 0.9*
CFI	0.93	≥ 0.9*
GFI	0.88	≥ 0.8*
RMSEA	0.074	≤ 0.08*

(Notes: N= 308, *(joseph 2010), (kline 2011), ** (marsh))

The value of CMIN/df is the normed chi-square, it indicates the fit of model the threshold value for this ideally is less than 3 however, and researchers also gave an upper threshold value that indicates a reasonable fit. This threshold value is between 2 and 5 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Wheaton et al., 1977). As per these criteria, the value 3.31 is considered reasonable and the model is deemed fit. On the other hand, the criteria for both IFI and CFI signifies a value closer to 1 and accepts a range of values from 0-1 as a good fit (Joseph et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). However, the values 0.93 for IFI and 0.93 for CFI are also acceptable as well as they fall in the given range and are fairly closer to 1. GFI represents the goodness of fit and its threshold value is ideally greater than .8 but can range from 0-1, the closer the value to 1 the better the fit (Kline, 2014). The value 0.88 for GFI is fairly close to the ideal value of 0.8, thus it is considered that model contains the goodness of fit. Lastly, RMSEA stands for root mean square error of approximation and its threshold value is less than .08 and ideally it is less than 0.05 and should not be more than 0.1 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The value 0.074 from the present study can be considered significant. Thus, after analyzing all the constructs the model is deemed moderately fit.

4.4   Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The final step structural equation modelling (SEM) is performed with the help of SPSS Amos 21. Table 5 below shows the casual relationships between the variables and represents their standardized regression weights shown through beta (β) values. The relation between independent variable BE and mediator CVP is shown to be significant as its significance level is less than .05 which shows that the hypothesis is accepted. Similarly, the

relationship between independent variable BE and dependent variables eWOM, and BS is significant with β values .355 and .202 respectively and both the hypotheses are accepted. The relation between mediator CVP and dependent variables eWOM and BS is also accepted due to significant p- values .01 and .006 and β values .281 and .679 respectively.

Table 5
Structural Equation Model

Hypotheses	**Paths**	**β**	**p-value**	**Result**
Linear effects				
H1	BE → CVP	.648	.006	Accepted
H2	BE → eWOM	.355	.010	Accepted
H3	BE → BS	.202	.008	Accepted
H4	CVP → eWOM	.281	.012	Accepted
H5	CVP → BS	.679	.006	Accepted
Mediation				
H6	BE→ CVP→ eWOM	.36	***	Accepted
H7	BE→CVP → BS	.66	***	Accepted

Note: BS= brand strength, BE= brand experience, CVP= customer perceived value and eWOM= electronic word of mouth. *** P < .001)

As far as the mediation is concerned the mediator CVP does mediate the relation between BE and dependent variable eWOM. As well as mediates the relationship between independent variable BE and dependent variable BS.

The path diagram shows the casual relationship between the variables. The factor loadings show that when the independent variable BE will change 1 unit eWOM will change by 35%. Similarly, change in BE by 1 will change CVP by 65% and the change in BE by 1 unit will change BS by 20%. Likewise, change in CVP by 1 unit will change eWOM by 28% and change in CVP by 1unit will change BS by 68%. Thus SEM analysis shows that the variables significantly impact each other.
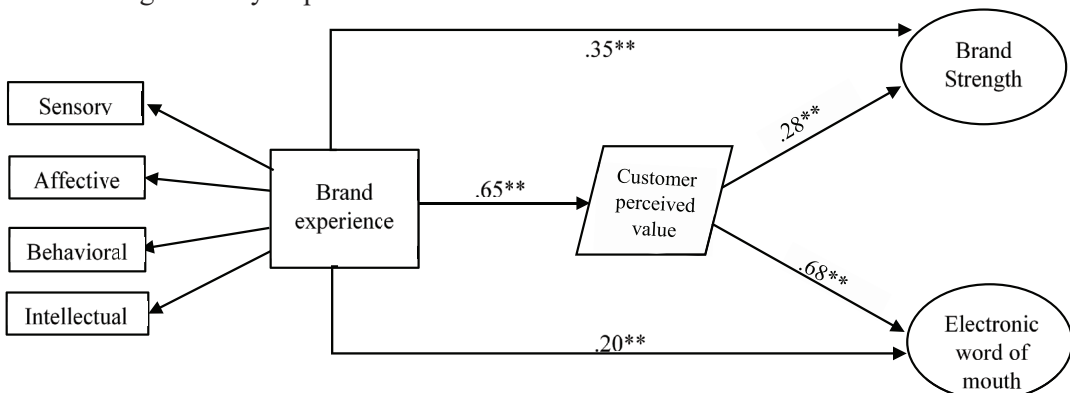

Figure 3: Path analysis

The mediation analysis is done through the path diagram. Results are obtained by computing and analyzing, direct, indirect, and total effects of the variables with each other. The mediation relationship BE→ CVP→ eWOM shows that CVP mediates the relation of BE and eWOM. Similarly, CVP also mediates the relation between BE and BS.

Table 6
Mediation

Parameter	Total		Direct		Indirect	
	BE	CVP	BE	CVP	BE	CVP
CVP	.648	.000	.648	.000	.000	.000
BS	.642	.679	.202	.679	.440	.000
eWOM	.537	.281	.355	.281	.182	.000

Total effects show the total effects that variables have on each other, including direct and indirect effects. BE has a total effect of .648 that shows with a 1-unit increase in BE, CVP will increase by 65%. The difference of total and direct effects of the variables shows that partial mediation exists in the model. Since BE indirectly impacts the dependent variable BS by .440, which means an increase in BE by 1 unit will increase BS indirectly by 44%. And the direct effect of BE on BS is .202, which means an increase in BE by 1 unit will increase BS directly by 20%. Hence, this difference shows that a mediator exists between BE and BS which is CVP. Similarly, the direct effect of BE on eWOM is .355 which means an increase in BE by 1 unit will increase eWOM by 35%. The indirect effect, however, differs from the direct one and shows that if BE is increased by 1-unit eWOM will indirectly increase by 18% again showing that a mediator is present between the two.

5.   Discussion and Conclusion

5.1   Discussion

The present research is aimed at finding the casual interplay of variables with each other. These variables, brand experience, customer perceived value, brand strength, and electronic word of mouth have never been studied in the context of the restaurant industry before. All the results indicate positive relationships. Moreover, the study was conducted by following the gaps as suggested by (Brakus et al., 2009; Mukerjee, 2018; Wiedmann et al., 2018). This study successfully builds relationships between the variables, the findings are discussed below. The first hypothesis that deals with the independent variable B.E and dependent variable BS were not rejected indicating a significant relationship between the variables this is in line with the previous researches in which researchers concluded that experience engages customers in turn enhancing the strength of the brand (Brakus et al., 2009; Carù & Cova, 2008; Feldwick, 1996). This shows that when brands engage in memorable experiences,

they, in turn, develop customer-based equity and customers are more likely to revisit that place because of the associations they have built with the brand. The same concept is also described through the experience marketing strategy and theory, which proposes that customer brand experiences are very significant and positive for building up positive word of mouth for the brand and brand strength, positive brand experiences do not only make the existing customers loyal but also attract the potential customers, building up the strength of the brand (Almohaimmeed, 2020; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). Furthermore, previous researchers also indicated that the hospitality industry specifically utilizes experiences to generate loyalty (Pine et al., 1999). The significant relationship in this study thus corresponds with the previous researches (Wiedmann et al., 2018). The second hypothesis was also significant. It shows that brand experience affects electronic word of mouth. This is, in fact in line with what previous researchers have concluded. Zhang et al. (2017) Established that experiential marketing affects word-of-mouth intentions. Experience marketing also proposes that there is a direct and significant impact of the brand experiences on the electronic word of mouth of the customers, because all of the customers are observed to be sharing their positive or negative brand experiences on social media with its significant emergence and growth. Moreover, potential customers are also assessed and analyzed to be looking for the brand product and service reviews present online on different social media applications before availing of the service or the product of a specific brand (Mihardjo et al., 2019; You et al., 2015). Moreover, Barnes et al. (2014) concluded that experience is a prerequisite of eWOM generation. This means that people that undergo memorable experiences utilize their freedom of opinion and post feedback or opinions online. This generates eWOM about the brand they are talking about (Choi et al., 2018; Ebrahim, 2020). Thus, the experience provided a reason for customers to talk about the brand in online communities which gives the brand/ restaurants an edge over the ones that do not provide unique experiences. The restaurants that give something extra be nitrogen ice cream or a pitch-black charcoal; ice cream that intrigues everyone, are more prone to generating buzz on social media sites, which automatically raises awareness about the brand. This shows that only a single viral item can create positive publicity for the restaurants. The third hypothesis also indicates a positive relationship between brand experience and customer value perception (CVP). Customers perceive a restaurant based on many aspects on f that aspect is the experience they had with the restaurant. This experience leads to a positive value perception (Yoo & Donthu, 2001) (Pine et al., 1999, Cetin & Dincer,2014). Thus, this study shows the same results as previous researches that linked value perception and brand experience but in a restaurant context. Moreover, Wiedmann et al. (2018)in his study identified that CVP is positively associated with brand experience, but in his study, he associated B.E with all the dimensions of CVP and all of them were significantly related (Ebrahim, 2020; Punjaisri et al., 2008). This also indicates that experiences are a competitive advantage that generates positive associations and value perception in the mind of consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The fourth hypothesis turned out to be significant as well. CVP impacts brand strength. Value perception has been strongly related to loyalty generation previously (McKee et al., 2006).

It has been said that superior value perception of a brand builds a superior strength as well (Wiedmann et al., 2018). This is true in the context of restaurants as well. If a customer finds a dining space more unique he would value that place and experience more this would, in turn, generate strong brand loyalty. Zauner et al. (2015) and their study presented results that indicated brand strength stems from positive customer value perception. Thus, the result of this study is also corresponding with past research. The result of this study shows that restaurants that develop superior value can generate consumer-based brand strength. The fifth hypothesis of this study showed that customer perceived value positively impacts eWOM. According to previous researches as well brand value creates positive word of mouth campaigns (Oluwafemi & Dastane, 2016). This means that value perception creates a sense of attaining superior value which in turn drives eWOM. When consumers feel they are being provided with value in a restaurant they will automatically give positive feedback and share pictures and videos online. Moreover, customers compare their perceived experiences with their actual restaurant experiences and they do it by reading online reviews (Kamtarin, 2012; Longart, 2010). Thus, this relationship is significant because it has been concluded by previous research as well. Restaurants that create value for the customer are more likely to produce positive eWOM via feedback, opinions, sharing or reviews.

In this study both the mediation, hypotheses were not rejected. However, results also indicate that partial mediation exists between the variables. This means the independent variable BE, has a relation with BS regardless of the mediator however, this relation is strengthened in the presence of the mediator CVP. The same is the case between the relationship of BE and eWOM in the presence of the mediator CVP. This means that the hypotheses proposed are significant. This illustrates that restaurants can increase their strength as well as their eWOM by providing value to consumers through delivering memorable experiences. Wiedmann et al. (2018) In their study offered similar results by linking BE. With brand strength though the mediator CVP and also concluded that value impacts their relationship. Similarly, Mukerjee (2018)conducted a study linking BE, eWOM, and value in this loyalty as the mediator, however, his study also showed positive results. Thus, value perception is essential for developing an overall dining experience.

5.2   *Conclusion*

Restaurants have changed dynamically in their operation and now provide experiences apart from food quality and variety. This study provides significant evidence that shows consumers are attracted to memorable experiences. Memorable experiences, in restaurants, are provided by theatrically presenting the food. Foods like lava cakes with warm oozing chocolate tempt the customers to post pictures and talk about the restaurant online. This study shows that brand experiences that occur in restaurants significantly impact the eWOM and persuade customers to post their feedback or opinions online. Moreover, this study also shows that brand experiences are related to the strength of the brand. If a restaurant is

providing memorable experiences, then it is more likely to gain the loyalty of its customers. Customers have higher revisit intentions due to a memorable experience. Furthermore, this study highlights the fact that the perception of customers is important as this mediates the relationship between the variables BE and eWOM, as well as between BE and BS. It shows that consumers form certain perceptions about the restaurants which then decides what course of action they would take. These perceptions either lead to positive word of mouths being spread through social media sites or lead to a stronger customer foundation. The perceptions act as a base in the formulation of repurchase behavior that is a strength of the brand. Additionally, this study supports the notion that customers are not just after quality food rather they visit restaurants to build memories and to experience unique feelings which are made possible through extravagant presentations, lavish themes, and using non/food items to produce a theatrical effect. These in turn gain the attention of customers and spread more awareness among customers about the restaurant's elaborate dining experiences.

5.3   *Research Implications*

This study contributes in two main ways. It contributes to the existing literature and theory moreover it has managerial implications as well. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a model for explaining the causal relationship between brand experience, customer perceived value brand strength, and electronic word of mouth. This study contributes to the parent theory by (Joyce, 1963; Keller, 1993), as it suggested that consumers build brand image and associations by reacting to marketing mix stimuli. However, this study provides insight beyond marketing mix elements, and ad theatrical elements which provide evidence for positive customer value perception increased brand strength and widely generated word of mouth. This study fills the existing gaps by providing a framework that links all the above-stated variables in a single model. Moreover, this study provides a basis for studying theatrics in the restaurant industry which was lacking before, no study deals with the extra efforts put in presenting foods and the overall theatrical dining experience thus study forms a basis for such studies in the future. Furthermore, no studies have been conducted in Pakistan that focuses on brand experience and its dimensions this study, therefore, contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing such a study. This study is beneficial for the managers, restaurants, and food industries in many aspects. A major contribution is the fact that this study forms the basis of theatrical study in the context of restaurant managers can utilize this knowledge to provide memorable experiences to their customers. Moreover, managers and chefs can work together to devise ways that make their food unique ad existing which in turn will attract customers. Moreover, managers of food places can utilize this study in order to engage more people in electronic word of mouth. That spreads awareness about the brand and attracts more footfall. People these days get all their necessary information online for which eWOM is essential. Furthermore, this study contributes to food manufacturers in terms of gaining a positive perception of the brand and gaining more consumer strength. Managers can learn from this study and increase the loyalty and strength of their brand. By

reading and applying this study, managers can gain insights into what the consumers actually want, as this study shows that customer wants more than a product or service, they want to have an "experience" and a memorable one at that which can only be provided by engaging consumers intellectually, cognitively and developing a sensory and behavioral aspect of the brand. Therefore, managers and restaurant owners should make changes in their existing menus a should introduce some items that can create a buzz in the online communities. They should grasp this opportunity to utilize modern technology to their benefit because these days, people try anything that goes viral, and for being viral restaurants should be able to create memorable experiences.

5.4   Limitations and Future Research

Like every research, this study has some limitations as well. Since, resources like, time budget and other essentials are limited, it entails that study cannot be conducted on the whole population for this the sample size is constrained as well. Future researchers can take a larger sample size of responders so that results can be generalized with better precision. Since this study was only conducted on the food sector particularly in restaurants and cafes of Pakistan, Future researchers can change the sector, or the country of the study conducted. For example, they can conduct a study on the clothing sector to know what experiences in that sector drives brand strength and eWOM in consumers. The next limitation corresponds to only a few variables tested, the causal relationship of only four variables is studied here, and there could have been others that affect the relationship. Future studies can take into account individual constructs of brand experience (behavioral, intellectual, cognitive, and sensory) and study their effects on other variables. Lastly, only positive word of mouth has been studied here which is also a limitation of this study as negative word of mouth impacts consumers and their decisions. Which can be taken into account for further study. Moreover, other moderators or mediators like brand awareness and brand associations can be applied to this model to know more about the interplay of different variables and in addition to this culture and demographics can be studied to know what initiates certain behaviors in various cultural groups and different genders.

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