Understanding Consumer Trust in E-commerce in emerging markets: A Comprehensive Analysis of Factors and Their Impacts

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Abstract

This study aims to test a conceptual model that examines the relationships among electronic retail (e-retail) service quality, trust, satisfaction, brand equity, repeat purchase intention and electronic word of mouth. A quantitative survey was conducted among online shoppers in India. The survey used established scales to measure constructs in the proposed models. The structural equation modelling (SEM) procedure was applied to test the model. The results confirmed that electronic service quality positively influences customer trust and satisfaction. Both trust and satisfaction were found to be significant influencers of consumer-based electronic retail brand equity. Brand equity positively influences electronic word of mouth and repeat purchase intention. E-retailers can use this model to measure, monitor, and improve their consumer's perceptions towards their brand.

Keywords: Consumer Trust, E-commerce, Social Media Marketing, Word-of-Mouth (WOM), Brand Equity, Customer Satisfaction, Consumer Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Brand equity, a widely recognized marketing concept, refers to the intrinsic value and perception associated with a particular brand. It encompasses the various tangible and intangible assets contributing to a brand's overall market worth. This term is a comprehensive indicator of a brand's standing and influence, encapsulating factors such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. The determination of value is contingent upon the consumer's perception and experiential encounters with the brand. Positive brand equity is attributed to brands that are held in high regard by consumers. When individuals perceive a brand favourably, it signifies the presence of positive brand equity. The concept of retail brand equity has emerged as a strategic tool employed by thriving retailers to maintain a competitive edge in a dynamic market characterized by evolving customer demands, intensifying competition, and a decline in customers' discretionary income ((Rashmi & Dangi, 2016).

When a company possesses a robust brand equity, consumers exhibit a willingness to incur a price premium for its offerings, notwithstanding the availability of an indistinguishable alternative from a competitor at a comparatively lower cost (Anselmsson et al., 2014). Brand equity metrics' primary aim is to assess a brand's intrinsic value quantitatively and encompasses a comprehensive set of elements that collectively distinguish and identify a particular product, service, or provider (Aaker, 1996). These elements include the brand name, logo, image, and customer perceptions. With these components, a brand, a brand establishes a unique identity and presence in the market, enabling consumers to recognize and differentiate it from competing offerings. The brand name serves as a verbal representation, while the logo visually represents the brand

through a distinctive symbol or design. The brand image encompasses the overall impression and associations consumers develop towards the brand, shaped by several factors, such as advertising. The phenomenon under examination manifests itself in various forms, namely advertising, packaging, and other promotional messages, thereby assuming a vital role in establishing and maintaining consumer connections.

Over its existence, a brand undergoes a transformative process wherein it evolves into a symbol that encapsulates a commitment pertaining to the products it signifies. This commitment revolves around various dimensions of value, such as quality, performance, and other factors, which hold the potential to sway consumers in their deliberations when faced with a choice between competing alternatives (Das et al., 2019).

When consumers perceive a brand to possess the qualities of trustworthiness and relevance, they are more inclined to select its products over those offered by competing brands, even in instances where the former may be priced at a premium. When the inherent value proposition of a brand transcends the confines of a solitary product, its proprietor can effectively leverage it as a strategic tool to penetrate and establish a presence in diverse markets.

Brand equity is a concept that pertains to the intrinsic value that a product garners because of its association with a particular brand name. In alternative parlance, the term alludes to the impact and favourable standing of a given brand. The focal point of this study revolves around the perceptual ease with which a brand is identified, its inherent value, and the favourable regard it garners from customers. Furthermore, we aim to explore the supplementary benefits of the associated products because of these accrue these aforementioned factors. It is imperative to bear in mind that the equity of a brand can also exhibit a reverse trajectory (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). Positive brand equity is a desirable state for a company, wherein customers hold favourable perceptions of its brand. Due to the interplay of various elements, a brand can acquire significant value, commonly called brand equity.

There is an observable inclination towards an upward trajectory in the perceived quality of retail brands across multiple nations. Retail brand marketing is known to engender consumer value through the strategic implementation of qualitative innovation, astute packaging techniques, and a diverse array of retail brands spanning the spectrum from generic offerings to those that embody the essence of value innovation. The concept of online retailer brand equity pertains to the distinctive impact consumers' awareness and understanding of a particular online store brand has on their purchasing behaviour and perceptions (Jara & Cliquet, 2012). It encompasses the perceptual advantage that a well-established online retailer brand holds over its competitors, resulting from the accumulated knowledge, associations, and experiences that consumers have developed with the brand over time . This differential effect is crucial in shaping consumers' attitudes, preferences, and loyalty towards the online retailer, influencing their decision-making processes and overall brand evaluations (Gil-Saura et al., 2013).

Drawing upon their individual experiences, anecdotal evidence, and exposure to the promotional efforts of a particular brand, individuals form their perceptions. The extant literature suggests that the enhancement of consumer-based brand equity in the realm of online retail can be achieved through the strategic implementation of several key factors (Christodoulides et al., 2006). These factors include the provision of exemplary service quality, the cultivation of consumer trust in the brand, and the fulfilment of consumers' expectations. By effectively addressing these dimensions, online retailers can effectively bolster their consumer-based brand equity.

The available scholarly literature in this specific field primarily focuses on the assessment of electronic retail's quality, rather than delving into the complexities associated with e-retail brand equity. It is important to recognize the inherent significance of establishing, nurturing, and maintaining consumer-centric retail brand equity, as it carries substantial strategic value for electronic retailers (Merrilees & Fry, 2002). Moreover, it is imperative to acknowledge the dearth of comprehensive endeavours aimed at integrating the qualitative dimensions of electronic retail, particularly with regard to customers' preferences in their online relationships, which encompass trust, value, satisfaction, and brand equity. (Herington & Weaven, 2009a).

The diverse conceptualizations found within the current body of online brand equity research highlight the imperative need to consolidate and condense the existing knowledge into a succinct model characterized by logical coherence, theoretical underpinnings, and comprehensive integration. Given the current circumstances, the principal objective of this inquiry is to put forth a comprehensive framework for consumer-based brand equity. This will be achieved through a meticulous amalgamation and concise recapitulation of existing scholarly works pertaining to consumer-based e-retail brand equity.

According to the minimal research that has been done thus far, it is possible to conclude that e-retail service quality, trust, satisfaction, value, and loyalty are some of the most important determinants of overall consumer-based online brand equity (Prateek Kalia et al., 2016). Research in this area focuses more on the quality of electronic retail rather than e-retail brand equity, despite its strategic importance for e-retailers to establish, nurture, and maintain their consumer-based retail brand equity (Troiville et al., 2019). In addition, there were little attempts made to integrate the qualitative dimensions of e-retail with the online relationship preferences of customers in the forms of trust, value, satisfaction, and brand equity.

The various and diverse conceptualizations in the existing online brand equity research call attention to the necessity of synthesizing and summarizing the existing research into a concise model that is more logical, theory-driven, and integrated. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to propose a model of consumer-based brand equity by synthesizing and summarizing the previous research conducted on consumer-based e-retail brand equity.

One might conclude that e-retail service quality, trust, contentment, value, and loyalty are some of the most important determinants of overall consumer-based online brand equity based on the scant research that has been conducted up until this point (Teck Ming et al., 2012).

For online retailers, the management of their retail brand equity is essential to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. Past studies suggest that online retailers can build stronger consumer-based brand equity by providing excellent service quality, building consumer trust on their brands, and meeting their expectations (Girard et al., 2016) . Previous studies have identified Electronic Service Quality, Online Trust and Customer Satisfaction are the antecedents of online retail brand equity. The study is conducted to test a conceptual model that establishes the relation between electronic service quality, online trust, customer satisfaction and brand equity and also to identify whether brand equity influences electronic word of mouth and repeat purchase intention.

The study conducted before focuses mainly on antecedents of the retail brand equity in online retailing. Previous study has identified electronic service quality, online trust and customer satisfaction as the antecedents of retail brand equity in online retailing. The significance of the study is to find whether repeat purchase intention is an outcome of retail brand equity in online retailing (Moreira et al., 2017).

The research is conducted among the users of online retail websites like Amazon , Flipkart, Myntra, Tata Cliq and Snapdeal. The primary data was collected from a sample of 250 respondents aged between 18 to 45 or above.

The study is quantitative research which focuses on whether electronic retail service quality, online trust and customer satisfaction leads to brand equity and whether brand equity leads to repeat purchase intention.

Electronic Service Quality

The assertion that the viability of enterprises in the contemporary competitive business landscape hinges upon the provision of superior products and services is substantiated by a substantial body of evidence (Garvin, 1988). The paramount importance of service quality cannot be overstated in any given context, whether considered an integral element of a service-oriented market offering or a constituent of a market characterized by tangible goods (Mao, 2021). It is widely acknowledged within the scholarly community that the attainment of desirable outcomes, such as repeat purchases, customer loyalty, and ultimately profitability, is contingent upon firms effectively addressing the service quality requirements of their customers (Trocchia & Janda, 2003). This assertion is supported by anecdotal and empirical evidence, as highlighted in the works of (Rust et al., 1995)

Scholars and experts specializing in the domains of electronic commerce, internet marketing, and internet retailing have collectively reached a consensus that, with the gradual maturation of the internet retailing market, the significance of service delivery and service quality has become equally pivotal in the online realm as it has traditionally been in brick-and-mortar establishments. Consequently, an array of scholarly investigations has been conducted to examine the ramifications of electronic service quality across diverse sectors, such as the travel and retailing industries (Lennon & Harris, 2002), as well as the financial services industry (Floh & Treiblmaier, 2006)

The comprehensive recognition of the Internet's potential impact on marketing strategies by marketers occurred at a subsequent juncture in time. Conversely, a growing realisation emerged that the integration of this novel technology into the distribution process necessitates the utmost consideration of consumer demands and customer satisfaction, as underscored by the seminal work of (Hung et al., 2015).

Internet marketers have realized that a visually appealing website, although fully operational, does not possess the distinguishing factor that some marketers may have initially anticipated. Instead, it is widely acknowledged that the quality of service offered will likely serve as the sole enduring method of differentiation, mirroring the situation observed in tangible goods(Zeithaml et al., 1996). This realization emerged concomitantly with the burgeoning utilization of the Internet for marketing endeavours.

The initial endeavours undertaken by scholars in academia to assess and quantify various facets of websites, exemplified by the SITEQUAL framework, were primarily grounded in consumer-centric perspectives (Kim et al., 2006; Webb & Webb, 2004)

In perception research, it is worth noting that previous studies have focused on convenience samples within controlled laboratory settings. However, it is essential to acknowledge that such approaches may not fully encapsulate the authentic experience of making online purchases. Several studies have focused on providing insights to website developers and designers(Loiacono et al., 2007), rather than fully understanding the intricate dynamics underlying consumers' purchasing decisions.

Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction refers to the reaction exhibited by consumers upon experiencing a state of fulfilment. According to (Oliver, 1980), it can be inferred that the evaluation of a specific component of a product or service, as well as the overall effect or service itself, is based on the subjective perception of the consumer's level of satisfaction derived from its consumption. This assessment encompasses both instances of happiness falling short of expectations and satisfaction cases exceeding expectations.

The affective state, commonly referred to as satisfaction, can be characterized as a transient psychological disposition that exhibits remarkable flexibility in its responsiveness to dynamic contextual factors. The construct under consideration, commonly called subjective experience, is conceptually differentiated from overt m overt behavioural manifestations such as consumer product selection, expression of dissatisfaction, and repeat purchase behaviour (Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1980). This distinction arises from the fact that subjective experience resides solely within the cognitive realm of the individual consumer.

In the past two decades, researchers have dedicated substantial efforts and resources to extensively investigating customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction, recognizing its pivotal role as a fundamental element within a company's marketing strategy. In the context of a fiercely competitive market, it is conceivable for any organization to attain a heightened level of competitive advantage by effectively fulfilling customer needs and desires. Numerous empirical investigations(Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Rust et al., 1995; Taylor & Baker, 1994)have consistently established a robust association between an organization's degree of customer satisfaction and the extent of customer loyalty displayed towards the said organization

The phenomenon of customer contentment can be understood as a psychological disposition that emerges from a comprehensive evaluation of a customer's experiential journey encompassing the stages of product or service acquisition utilization and financial transaction.

Upon the culmination of the purchase process, the consumer demonstrates a discernible disposition encompassing attitude, evaluation, and emotional response, which may aptly be characterised as satisfaction. The manifestation of satisfaction with a product or service that has been acquired indicates a positive consumer experience. In their seminal work, (Minarti & Segoro, 2014) the subject matter comprehensively. Their study delved into various aspects and provided valuable insights into customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is widely recognized as a pivotal determinant of customer loyalty, a crucial phenomenon in consumer behaviour. To the seminal work by (Heskett et al., 1997), it can be posited that customer loyalty is quantitatively assessed as an outcome of customer satisfaction.

The positive correlation between the extent to which a customer's expectations are fulfilled during the provision of a service and the subsequent probability of customer retention and repeat purchases has been well-documented in academic literature. It has been observed in previous studies conducted by esteemed researchers such as (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000) and (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002) that customers who express satisfaction with an organization are more likely to engage in repurchasing behaviour and engage in positive word-of-mouth communication about said organization. There is rich research evidence that e-service quality has a positive influence on customer satisfaction in online retailing (Demir et al., 2021; Herington & Weaven, 2009b; Lin et al., 2016; Sheng & Liu, 2010; Venkatakrishnan et al., 2023).
Hence, we propose the hypothesis

E- Service quality has a positive influence on customer satisfaction

Trust

The concept of customer trust is a fundamental aspect of business relationships and has garnered significant attention from researchers and practitioners alike. The essential role of trust in shaping social connections cannot be overstated, as it serves as the bedrock upon which these connections are built. Without trust, one can anticipate the eventual dissolution or, at best, the erratic functioning of such links. Trust can be succinctly encapsulated as an individual's total conviction in the reliability and dependability of another person's verbal commitments (Rotter, 1967). Client trust can be conceptualized as the cognitive, affective, and behavioural manifestations that customers demonstrate when they believe a supplier possesses the capability and willingness to act to their utmost benefit, even when relinquishing direct control over the transactional process . (Johnson & Grayson, 2005)

The establishment of trust between two parties can be exemplified by one partner placing their faith in the honesty and dependability of the other partner, resulting in the development of confidence (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) .

Trust can be conceptualized as the voluntary vulnerability of one party to the actions of another party, driven by the anticipation that the latter will undertake a specific action that holds significance for the former. Notably, this reliance on trust is independent of the trustor's capacity to actively oversee or influence the activities of the trusted party. The provided definition exhibits a mendable level of inclusivity, effectively encompassing the multifaceted nature of trust within diverse business contexts and interactions. The activities undertaken by the counterparty encompass a range of crucial aspects, such as ensuring timely delivery of the product, adhering to the agreed-upon specifications of the product as initially stipulated, and handling any personal information acquired during the transaction (Nasir & Morgan, 2017).

In traditional retail, it is commonly observed that the pivotal factor influencing the establishment of trust between the customer and the vendor predominantly rests upon the salesperson. Within the realm of the internet, the website fulfils the crucial role

of performing the said function. Consequently, it can be inferred that the interactions between customers and a company's website substantially influence the degree of trust that customers place in the e in the organization .

A positive correlation has been observed between the extent of prior interaction between consumers and salespersons and the level of trust established. Establishing trust between customers and salespersons is a crucial factor that contributes to the overall confidence in a company. Extensive research conducted by (Crosby et al., 1990) and(Doney & Cannon, 1997) has demonstrated a strong positive correlation between customers' trust in a salesperson and their trust in the company. This correlation is influenced by various characteristics the salesperson exhibits, such as expertise and likeability.

In e-commerce, it is customary for customers to engage with a company's website instead of a traditional salesperson. The potential ramifications of this phenomenon entail that the perceptions and encounters of consumers with the website could potentially influence their conjectures about the organizational characteristics and dependability (Tan & Thoen, 2000)

In the realm of e-commerce, the notion of trust pertains to the cognitive disposition of an individual or organization, wherein they exhibit a sense of assurance in the retailer's ethical conduct, ensuring that the latter will refrain from exploiting any vulnerabilities or weaknesses that may be present (Corritore et al., 2003).

The focal point of trust undergoes a transition from individuals and product brands to the e-retailing brand, thereby establishing a distinction between trust in online contexts and trust in offline contexts (Beldad et al., 2010; Shankar et al., 2002). One potential avenue for discerning online trust from offline trust in examining their respective characteristics and dynamics.

The distinction between trust in the online and offline contexts is inherently rooted in the fundamental difference in its foundation. Trust in the online context is primarily established on a person-to-website basis, as opposed to the traditional person-to-person basis observed offline (Hahn & Kim, 2009; Winch & Joyce, 2006). The underlying cause for this phenomenon can be attributed to the fundamental nature of the online context, which primarily operates on a person-to-website paradigm rather than a person-to-person paradigm.
We propose the following hypothesis

E-Service Quality has a positive influence on trust

Retailer Brand equity

Given the premise that numerous organizations offer similar products and services, and employ similar distribution strategies, it becomes apparent that establishing a robust brand equity may not always be attainable. One of the primary ways consumers can discern and differentiate between various brands is through the concepts of brand equity and pricing distinction. These two factors are crucial in shaping shaping consumer perceptions and preferences in the marketplace. Brand equity refers to a brand's intangible value and reputation, which is built over time through consistent delivery of quality, reliability, and positive associations. It encompasses elements such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. By establishing a strong brand equity, companies can effectively differentiate themselves from their competitors and cultivate a loyal customer base. Additionally, pricing distinction is another significant aspect that aids in brand differentiation. Similarly, the customer decision-making process is influenced by the level of involvement, as discussed by (Gotlieb et al., 1992) in their seminal work in 1992

Brand equity refers to the additional value that products and services possess as a result of their association with a particular brand. This value is derived from various factors, such as brand recognition, brand reputation, and consumer perceptions. The concept of brand equity is rooted in the understanding that consumers are willing to pay a premium for products or services that are associated with a strong and reputable brand. Consequently, brand equity plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behaviour, market positioning, and overall business performance. The manifestation of brand perception can be observed in individuals' cognitive processes, emotional responses, and behavioural tendencies towards the brand. Furthermore, this phenomenon extends to the financial outcomes of the brand, including pricing dynamics, market penetration, and overall

profitability, thereby influencing the organization's bottom line. According to Kotler (2009), it is evident that the subject matter under discussion holds significant importance within the academic and research community.

Brand equity, in its essence, can be comprehended as a comprehensive assemblage of brand-related assets and liabilities that are intrinsically intertwined with a brand, encompassing its name and symbol. These assets and liabilities possess the potential to either augment or diminish the value that a product or service bestows upon a company and/or its customer base (Aaker, 1992)

The concept of a brand encompasses a name, term, design, symbol, or any other constituent that serves the purpose of differentiating the goods or services offered by one seller from those of other sellers. According to the American Marketing Association (2009), it is evident that the field of marketing has undergone significant transformations in recent years. The research conducted by the association sheds light on the evolving nature of consumer behaviour and the impact of

Brands possess a compelling allure for consumers owing to their inherent ability to ensure a high standard of quality, reliability, and uniformity across various iterations of a given product. The advent of brands has significantly enhanced the browsing experience of individuals, enabling them to navigate through options with greater speed and assurance. This, in turn, translates into time and energy savings for consumers when they are faced with making purchasing decisions. The presence of established brands serves to mitigate the perceived risk associated with a particular product or service. Brands have been found to offer individuals a range of emotional gratification and pleasurable experiences. This phenomenon has garnered significant attention among researchers and academicians alike. The emotional gratification derived from brands refers to the positive affective states experienced by consumers, such as joy, happiness, and satisfaction, which are elicited through their interactions with brands. These emotional experiences are often In accordance with the seminal work of (Kapferer & Laurent, 1985), it is evident that his research has made significant contributions to the field

In addition, it is imperative to acknowledge that manufacturers can reap substantial advantages from leveraging the reputation and recognition associated with established and renowned brands. The inability of competitors to replicate brands confers several advantages to manufacturers, enabling them to command higher prices for their preferred brands, expand their market share, and curtail expenditures on promotional activities such as advertising and price promotions (Shocker and Weitz, 1998).

In addition to its utility in facilitating balance sheet accounting and other financial transactions, the assessment of a brand's equity holds significant value in informing marketing strategy and tactical decision-making. By comprehending the magnitude of a brand's equity, managers are equipped to evaluate the feasibility of extending the brand name to novel products and unexplored markets. Furthermore, this assessment aids managers in gauging the efficacy of their marketing endeavours, thereby enabling them to make informed judgements regarding the effectiveness of their decisions. The quantification of a brand's equity holds significant value for businesses, as it facilitates the assignment of a monetary worth to the brand (Keller, 1993).

Consumer-based research techniques encompass a comprehensive array of measures that aim to capture various facets of customer perceptions, attitudes, awareness, knowledge, familiarity, preference, purchase intentions, satisfaction, loyalty, buy share, and repurchase rates. These measures serve as invaluable tools for researchers and academicians seeking to delve into the intricate dynamics of consumer behaviour and gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence consumer decision-making. o enhance one's comprehension of customer-based brand equity, it is advantageous to employ the hierarchy of effects model as a valuable framework (Agarwal & Rao, 1996).

The concept of brand personality is relevant in product differentiation within a specific product category. It serves as a pivotal determinant of consumer preference and usage patterns and a unifying element that can effectively transcend cultural boundaries in brand marketing efforts.

The development of online brand equity differs from offline brand equity in terms of the underlying process rather than the outcomes it generates. As distinguished from its offline counterpart, the concept of online brand equity is predicated upon the

collaborative efforts of customers and retailers. Unlike offline brand equity, which may be imposed upon consumers through various associations, online brand equity is a product of the customer's interaction and engagement with the brand. Furthermore, it is essential to note that online brand equity is not solely confined to the digital realm. Still, it encompasses a customer's experience with the brand, encompassing both online and offline touchpoints (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010).

Brand equity refers to the assemblage of tangible and intangible assets and liabilities that are intrinsically associated with a particular brand, encompassing its distinctive name and symbol.

The following hypothesis are formulated

Customer satisfaction has a positive influence on retailer brand equity

Trust has positive influence on retailer brand equity

Repeat Purchase Intention

Customer satisfaction is a crucial determinant that influences purchase intention. Customer satisfaction is a distinct and noteworthy manifestation of consumer sentiment. The phenomenon under consideration is commonly referred to as post-purchase evaluation, which pertains to the assessment of an individual's level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a particular brand or service after their consumption experience. Numerous empirical investigations have substantiated that consumer satisfaction is indeed influenced by the quality of service provided. Consequently, this pivotal factor is decisive in shaping consumers' intentions to engage in repeat purchases (Bansal & Taylor, 1999).

The phenomenon of repeat purchase is characterized by customers engaging in multiple instances of purchasing identical products from a particular brand, despite the absence of a profound emotional attachment to said brand (Hyun et al., 2022). The provision of gratifying experiences for customers assumes paramount importance in the endeavour of customer loyalty, thereby transcending the relationship between buyers and sellers (Mason, 2001)

Repeat purchase intention is a phenomenon that manifests when consumers proactively engage in the acquisition of a particular brand of goods or services for a subsequent time. This behavioural tendency reflects a cognitive inclination towards maintaining brand loyalty and a preference for continuity in consumption patterns. The concept of repeat purchase intention encompasses the phenomenon of repeat purchase behaviour.

When a consumer exhibits a propensity to repurchase a particular brand or product, it is typically attributable to their prior encounter with it had yielded a positive experiential outcome or having successfully fulfilled their expectations. Indeed, it is imperative to acknowledge that repeat purchase is the paramount determinant that propels a company towards achieving success, as asserted by the esteemed scholars (Bowen & Chen, 2001)in their seminal work published in 2001.

Repeat customers are essential to companies due to their potential for loyalty, willingness to pay premium prices, aptitude for rapid information assimilation, and propensity to serve as effective brand ambassadors (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

Research has consistently demonstrated that the expenditure associated with acquiring new consumers is significantly greater, approximately fivefold, compared to the cost incurred in retaining existing customers who exhibit repeat purchase behaviour. One of the various rationales behind the advantageous nature of customer retention for an organisation has been expounded upon by (Yin et al., 2022).

The consumer's demand for a product, their attitude towards the product, and their perceptions of the company and sales personnel, collectively influence the probability of subsequent purchase. The intensification of competition within the global market has reached unprecedented levels, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the escalating costs associated with

customer acquisition. Consequently, many product and service providers exhibit a keen interest in discerning the optimal strategies for fostering customer retention.

The likelihood of a consumer engaging in repeat purchase behaviour is significantly enhanced when they experience satisfaction with their initial purchase, thereby fostering brand loyalty and subsequent brand repurchasing tendencies.

The enhancement of consumers' post-purchase satisfaction can be attributed to the implementation of post-purchase customer service, as evidenced by the positive correlation between these factors and the Repurchase Intention (RPI) of consumers, as highlighted in the seminal work of Engel et al. (1986). It has been observed that customers who exhibit a high level of satisfaction with the service they receive tend to display a reduced propensity towards price sensitivity. Moreover, consumers have a higher propensity to engage in subsequent purchases of analogous products.

Consumers who possess a strong brand loyalty exhibit a higher degree of resistance towards the influence exerted by competing businesses within the market. This steadfast commitment to a particular brand is indicative of a deep-rooted connection and trust established between the consumer and the brand in question. Consequently, these loyal consumers are less susceptible to being swayed or persuaded by the actions and strategies employed by other businesses operating within the same market. A substantial body of research has consistently provided support for the hypothesis positing a favourable association between [variable] and RPI. This association has been observed to manifest both in immediate effects as well as indirectly, stemming from the influential impact of [variable]. In a seminal study conducted by(Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004), the authors explored a significant aspect of their research domain. Their work has since become a cornerstone in the field.

 We posit the following hypothesis

Retailer brand equity has a positive influence on Repeat purchase intention

E-Word of Mouth

The phenomenon of buyer's remorse is a ubiquitous experience that manifests in varying degrees among individuals following each purchase. This remorseful sentiment often precipitates the subsequent return of items or the cancellation of purchases, as elucidated by Friedman's seminal work in 2012.

 Given the significance of the phenomenon, it is imperative for enterprises to possess a profound understanding of buyer's remorse, as it exerts a discernible influence on consumer behaviour pertaining to subsequent purchase decisions. The probability of a consumer engaging in a subsequent purchase holds significant importance for a retailer's ability to generate profits and maintain a loyal customer base ((Kuo et al., 2013; Oliver et al., 1997).

In recent years, there has been a notable shift in consumer behaviour, with a growing inclination towards utilizing online platforms, including social media, blogs, and similar websites, as channels for expressing their perspectives on the products and services they acquire (Gupta & Harris, 2010; Lee et al., 2013). Moreover, these digital resources have also become instrumental in facilitating consumer research endeavours, enabling individuals to gather information about the organizations that offer these goods and services. The utilization of these tools has yielded significant effects on various aspects of individuals' daily routines as well as the dynamics of engagement between consumers and corporations.

The scholarly pursuit of understanding word of mouth (WOM) and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged in response to the exponential expansion of online communication facilitated by various social media platforms, websites, and blogs (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997; S. Hussain et al., 2018; Sweeney et al., 2012).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a valuable tool for organizations, offering a cost-effective avenue for customer communication and a means to gain insights into customer requirements and perceptions ((Nieto et al., 2014)). In contemporary times, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has emerged as a consequential platform for the implementation of social media marketing strategies by businesses (J. Hussain et al., 2016).

The phenomenon commonly referred to as "social communication," "word-of-mouth," "opinion leadership," or "buzz" encompasses a highly influential and pervasive force that significantly shapes consumer behaviour. These concepts encompass the ramifications of customer interactions on one another, arising from their communication exchanges. The scholarly community has long acknowledged the profound importance of offline social communication in shaping human interaction .
The advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web has ushered in a novel realm for consumer interaction, enabling them to engage in heightened levels of communication and exert greater influence upon one another.

The manifestation of this phenomenon is characterized by a fervent engagement, as evidenced by the substantial volume of interpersonal interactions taking place in the digital realm. These exchanges assume diverse manifestations, thereby underscoring the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. Moreover, marketers and managers, albeit reluctantly, have come to recognize the indispensability of this facet in the realm of electronic commerce.
The growing recognition of discussion boards and other online communication tools, which facilitate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), stems from their observed impact on the adoption and use of various products and services (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). While electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) undoubtedly serves as a valuable tool for the dissemination of essential information, it is crucial to acknowledge that the actual influence and reception of acquired knowledge can vary significantly among individuals. Based on the seminal work by (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976), there exists the potential for identical content to elicit varying effects on individuals.

We propose the following hypothesis
Retailer brand equity has a positive influence on E-word of mouth

Figure 1:Conceptual Model
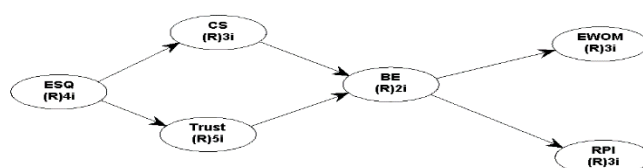
Methodology and Results
Data was collected from individuals who have purchased from online stores. The sample consisted of 250 respondents who were of the age group of 18-45 years. A structured questionnaire were distributed to the respondents using google forms. Out of 400 distributed forms, 250 forms were collected back which met the quality criteria set by the researcher,. Model and hypothesis testing was done using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using Warpl PLS 8.0.
Measures: Reliability and Validity
The constructs used in the research were considered valid, with factor loadings greater than 0.5 and the p-values associated with the loadings were lower than 0.05. The average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) for the variables were found to be greater than 005 and 0.07 respectively which confirms the convergent validity. According to Fornell

and Larcker, 1981, the discriminant validity is ensured if the square root of AVE for each variable is higher than any of the correlations involving the respective construct which was validated in this research. The results are shown in the tables.

Hypothesis testing were done through Warp PLS 8.0 (figure 2). PLS-SEM fit indices for the model are shown in the Table 2 . The model was checked for robustness. Estimates suggest that the effect of online service quality on customer satisfaction (β = 0.69, p < 0.001) with a predictability of 48%. Customer satisfaction is found to be positively influencing Online brand equity

Figure 2: Measurement Model

Table 1 : Reliability			
Construct	Composite Reliability (CR)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
ESQ	0.877	0.813	0.641
CS	0.846	0.728	0.648
BE	0.870	0.702	0.770
Trust	0.888	0.842	0.613
RPI	0.873	0.781	0.696
EWOM	0.900	0.833	0.750

((β = 0.31, p < 0.001). The study posits that electronic service quality has a positive influence on trust (β = 0.64, p < 0.001). Trust also has a positive influence on online brand equity(β = 0.42, p < 0.001). The research confirms the positive influence of customer satisfaction and trust on key customer outcomes electronic word of mouth and repeat purchase intention.
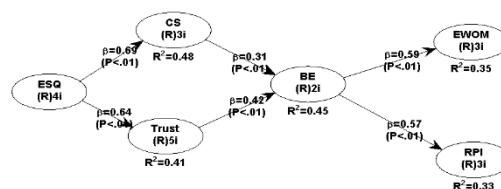

Table 2 Model Fit Indices

Model fit and quality indices

Average path coefficient (APC)=0.538, P<0.001

Average R-squared (ARS)=0.403, P<0.001

Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)=0.401, P<0.001

Average block VIF (AVIF)=1.814, acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3

Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)=2.492, acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3

Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)=0.526, small >= 0.1, medium >= 0.25, large >= 0.36

Simpson's paradox ratio (SPR)=1.000, acceptable if >= 0.7, ideally = 1

R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)=1.000, acceptable if >= 0.9, ideally = 1

Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)=1.000, acceptable if >= 0.7

Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)=1.000, acceptable if >= 0.7

The model fit and quality indices, considering the acceptable ranges for the final iteration, are as follows: the average block Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) stands at 1.814 (≤ 5), which is well within the acceptable range and slightly below the ideal threshold of 3.3. However, the average full collinearity VIF was computed as 2.492, indicating that it falls within an acceptable range (≤ 5) within the ideal threshold of 3.3. The Tenenhaus GoF (Goodness of Fit) measures 0.526, which, while considered small, surpasses the threshold for acceptability (≥ 0.1). Simpson's paradox ratio is at 1.000, meeting the acceptable criterion (≥ 0.7), and the R-squared contribution ratio is also at 1.000, comfortably exceeding the acceptable threshold (≥ 0.9). The statistical suppression ratio registers at 1.000, meeting the criterion of ≥ 0.7. Lastly, the non-linear bivariate causality direction ratio stands at 1.000, once again meeting the acceptable threshold of ≥ 0.7. Taken together, these values indicate that the model demonstrates good fit and quality.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal intricate relationships within the examined model of social media usage. Understanding these connections is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of user behavior and its implications for businesses and marketers. We discuss the key findings below:

Direct Effects:

The direct effects analysis elucidates the individual contributions of each variable in the model. Firstly, the direct effect of ESQ on CS is substantial (0.693), emphasizing the importance of perceived service quality in shaping customer satisfaction. This underscores the significance of businesses ensuring high service quality to satisfy their customers.

Secondly, the direct impact of CS on BE (0.314) demonstrates that customer satisfaction positively influences brand engagement. This suggests that content and strategies geared towards enhancing customer satisfaction can translate into increased brand engagement, a valuable outcome for firms seeking to establish strong customer-brand relationships.

Thirdly, the direct influence of Trust on BE (0.573) highlights the pivotal role of trust in driving brand engagement. Trust is a critical component of consumer-brand relationships, and our findings underscore that it directly impacts brand engagement levels.

Lastly, the direct effects of ESQ on both EWOM (0.129) and RPI (0.125) indicate that service quality is associated with increased electronic word-of-mouth and repeat purchase intention. This demonstrates that providing a high-quality service not only satisfies customers but also encourages them to engage in positive word-of-mouth and consider future purchases, contributing to brand loyalty.

Indirect Effects:

The analysis of indirect effects further enhances our understanding of the interplay between variables. Notably, the serial mediation of CS and BE on the relationship between ESQ and EWOM, as well as ESQ and RPI, is evident. This implies that, beyond their direct impact, customer satisfaction and brand engagement serve as intermediaries in the relationship between service quality, electronic word-of-mouth, and repeat purchase intention.

Specifically, the indirect effect analysis reveals that CS and BE collectively mediate the relationship between ESQ and EWOM and between ESQ and RPI. These findings suggest that enhancing service quality can indirectly influence EWOM and RPI by first fostering customer satisfaction and subsequently encouraging brand engagement. This underscores the importance of not only delivering quality service but also nurturing customer satisfaction and facilitating brand engagement as pathways to favorable outcomes in the digital era.

Table 3 : Indirect Effects

Indirect Effect	Indirect effect	p-value	Total effect	p-value	Effect size	VAF	Mediation
ESQ -> CS -> BE	0.267	<0.001	0.267	<0.001	0.135	50.19%	Yes
ESQ -> Trust -> BE	0.153	<0.001	0.153	<0.001	0.092	21.38%	Yes
ESQ -> CS -> BE -> eWOM	0.158	<0.001	0.158	<0.001	0.096	21.78%	Yes
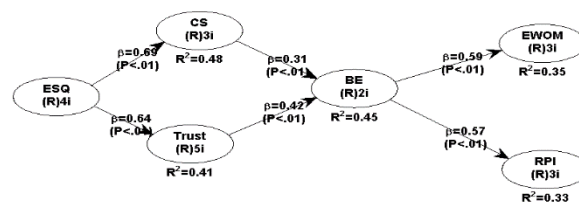
ESQ -> Trust -> BE -> eWOM	0.092	<0.001	0.093	<0.001	0.056	16.23%	Yes
ESQ -> CS -> BE -> RPI	0.092	<0.001	0.093	<0.001	0.056	16.98%	Yes
ESQ -> Trust -> BE -> RPI	0.092	<0.001	0.093	<0.001	0.056	16.98%	Yes

In conclusion, our study provides valuable insights into the complex network of relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, brand engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, and repeat purchase intention. Recognizing the direct and indirect effects of these variables can empower businesses to formulate more effective strategies for engaging customers, building trust, and ultimately enhancing brand performance in the highly competitive digital landscape.

Implications for Managers

The findings of this study offer several important implications for managers and marketing practitioners aiming to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of digital consumer behavior and brand engagement:

Prioritizing Service Quality: Our study underscores the pivotal role of service quality (ESQ) in shaping customer satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM), and repeat purchase intention (RPI). Managers should prioritize and invest in maintaining consistently high service quality standards. This not only satisfies customers directly but also indirectly influences their likelihood to engage with the brand and spread positive word-of-mouth.

Fostering Customer Satisfaction: Given the significant direct effect of customer satisfaction (CS) on brand engagement (BE), managers should focus on strategies that foster customer satisfaction. This may involve personalized experiences, responsive customer service, and addressing customer needs and preferences promptly. Satisfied customers are more likely to engage with the brand, leading to increased loyalty and advocacy.

Building Trust: Trust emerges as a critical driver of brand engagement, with a substantial direct effect observed. Managers should actively work on building and maintaining trust with their customers. Transparency, reliability, and consistency in brand interactions can contribute to trustworthiness and, consequently, enhanced brand engagement.

Recognizing Indirect Effects: The study reveals the serial mediation of customer satisfaction and brand engagement in the relationships between service quality and both electronic word-of-mouth and repeat purchase intention. Managers should acknowledge these indirect pathways. Strategies aimed at improving service quality should be complemented by efforts to encourage brand engagement and customer satisfaction, recognizing their role as mediators in achieving desired outcomes.

Digital Engagement Strategies: In the digital age, brand engagement encompasses various touchpoints, including social media, online reviews, and interactive content. Managers should adapt their engagement strategies to align with the digital channels most frequented by their target audience. Engaging content, active social media presence, and user-generated content campaigns can facilitate brand engagement and amplify the impact of positive service experiences.

Monitoring and Feedback: Continuous monitoring of customer satisfaction, trust, and brand engagement metrics is essential. Managers should leverage data analytics tools to gain insights into consumer sentiment and behavior. Soliciting feedback, both

positive and negative, can help in identifying areas for improvement and tailoring strategies to meet evolving consumer expectations.

In conclusion, this study's implications for managers emphasize the significance of a holistic approach to managing customer relationships in the digital era. By prioritizing service quality, fostering customer satisfaction, building trust, and recognizing indirect effects, managers can position their brands for sustained success in an increasingly competitive and digitally-driven marketplace.

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