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E-WOM Impact on Brand Loyalty of Organic Food by Igniting Perceived Quality Mediation

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Abstract

Digital marketing development has had an impact on the way consumers communicate with brands. With the rise of e-WOM communication, consumers now have a platform to share the branded product quality and perception experience that may lead to increased brand loyalty to products that prioritize safety and health, which is relevant for organic food. This study scrutinized perceived quality mediation in the nexus of e-WOM communication and brand loyalty concerning organic food. The population consisted of the consumers of branded organic food in the Asir region area in the South of the Saudi Kingdom. The study pretested 40 questionnaires among academicians. The study sample consisted of regular and occasional reliable shoppers of branded organic food. The study used a designed questionnaire to collect data and only analyzed 435 valid questionnaires. The results exhibited that e-WOM communication impacted the perceived quality and brand loyalty regarding organic food. In Addition, perceived quality affected brand loyalty regarding organic food. Finally, perceived quality partially mediated the relationship between e-WOM communication and brand loyalty concerning organic food brands. In turn, the study findings were interesting concerning consumers who prefer consuming branded organic food, which is beneficial for consumers looking to make informed decisions about their food choices considering the studied variables. Additionally, producers and marketers should take note of the roles of e-WOM communication and perceived quality when planning their marketing strategies, policies, and campaigns to ignite brand loyalty and foster various stakeholders' benefits.

Keywords: E-WOM Communication, Perceived Quality, Brand Loyalty, Organic Food.

1. Introduction

Most likely, the technological digitization development and Internet services use has enabled consumers to access various product information (Wang, Pham, & Dang, 2020). At the consumer level, to acquire more information, e-WOM communication represents an attempt to move opinions about a company's products across the internet or social media platforms

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like Facebook and Instagram from one person to the next (Syahrivar & Ichlas, 2018). Besides, at another level, marketers can use posts and comments on electronic outlets like social media platforms that lure customers to share, communicate, and transfer content with their friends and mates (Zayed, Gaber, & El Essawi, 2022). Therefore, in the digital age, it is familiar for companies and consumers to use Internet platforms, such as websites and social media accounts, to exchange and share their information of experiences about products and brands, to the extent that it can affect the quality perception of consumers and loyalty to the brands. Notably, brand loyalty consists of both attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty that share positively in brand performance related to the concerned products (Yeh, Wang, & Yieh, 2016). Worthwhile, Nuzula and Wahyudi (2022) explained that perceived quality is the consumer assessment of the product's superiority.

Thus, most presumably, attitudinal and behavioral loyalty of consumers toward product quality in constructing composite loyalty may depend on product perceived quality, which also requires sharing information of experiences through various online sources and tools. Nevertheless, consumers lack information or have only asymmetric information on which to base their decisions. The online information shares named electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication (DÜLEK & Aydın, 2020). Nuzula and Wahyudi (2022) summarized that e-WOM is an electronic communication tool conveying information from someone to another for brands and products. Hence, e-WOM communication has become a new source of valuable information for buying and decision-making (Heng Wei, Chuan Huat, & Arumugam, 2023) as consumers increasingly lean on e-WOM communication because conceivable information acquisition is easier through it.

Bock, Lee, Kuan, and Kim (2012) apprised that electronic word of mouth is superior to perceived quality because it is a well-known form that relates to the consumer's perceptions. Consumers compare products to various alternatives (Nuzula & Wahyudi, 2022), and then it is more desirable to buy a product with high-quality features (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2021). Worthwhile, product quality is an assemblage of attributes linked to products or brand quality consumer perceptions (Kurniawan & Indriani, 2018). Conclusively, e-WOM communication significantly affected perceived quality (Syahrivar & Ichlas, 2018). Hence, e-WOM communication has confirmed an effect on the perceived quality of products (goods or services) as in several previous studies (Syahrivar & Ichlas, 2018) and (Vinh, Thanh, Ngan & Phuong, 2021). Despite, academic platforms have comprehended that there is unfinished and incoherent literature available on e-WOM, there is a need to know, examine, and test the spread of e-WOM from precise perspectives systematically (Hussain, Huang, Ilyas, & Niu, 2020; Muritala, Snchez-Rebull, & Hernandez-Lara, 2020; Redditt, Orłowski, Fyall, Gregory, & Ro, 2022; Reyes-Menendez, Correia, Matos, & Adap, 2020). Additionally, it is inescapable to investigate consumers' responses to marketing communications with the latest technologies (Baydas, Bayat, & Yaşar, 2019).

Despite the e-WOM communication as an influential factor in perceived quality, several studies examined the e-WOM communication construct in influencing the loyalty of consumers like studies of (Bismoaziiz, Suhud, & Saporuddin, 2021) and (Putra, Himawati, Suzana, & Oktavilantika, 2023). An essential tool in today's digital world that helps link digital technology adoption to customer loyalty is e-WOM, a contemporary epoch of word-of-mouth (Belhadi, Kamble, Benkhati, Gupta, & Mangla, 2022). For confirmation, brand loyalty is one of the elements of brand equity (Harisandi, Hurriyati, & Dirgantari, 2024). Previous studies indicated that concentrating on various marketing factors like word of mouth was paramount to affecting brand equity (Hanaysha, 2016). Therefore,

e-WOM communication influences consumers brand linked attitudes and behavior (Chiu, Wang, Ho, Zhang, & Zhao, 2019; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

In continuing to the above, product quality motivates brand loyalty (Yee & Sidek, 2008). Malia and Setiadi, 2023 pointed out that perceived quality affects brand loyalty. Accordingly, investigations have reported that perceived quality via trust and satisfaction with the brand evolves brand loyalty (Vazifehdoost & Negahdari, 2018). Thus, as long e-WOM is a persuasive tool for consumers in familiarizing, appraising, and suggesting brands, it marks influentially on brand loyalty (Praharjo, Wilopo, & Kusumawati, 2016; Vinh, Thanh, Ngan, & Phuong, 2021). Therefore, brands symbolize product quality and it is acceptable to consider the consumer's quality perception; therefore, perceived quality may affect the e-WOM and brand loyalty nexus.

Back to the start, there was a gap in analyzing and incorporating perceived quality into sustainable food products (Wang, Tao, & Chu, 2020), even though quality has become one of the critical items in evaluating organic food (Boobalan & Nachimuthu, 2020). Notably, consumers have developed positive organic food attitudes and behaviors (Suciu, Ferrari, & Trevisan, 2019), as it is more environmentally friendly and nutritious, contains less harmful ingredients, and is of higher quality than conventional food (Boobalan & Nachimuthu, 2020; Kushwah, Dhir, Sagar, & Gupta, 2019; Suciu, Ferrari, & Trevisan, 2019). Worth noting, e-WOM engagement will be influential when focusing on organic food as the online information consumers' exposition fosters the beliefs of consumers that they can consume organic food (Zayed, Gaber, & El Essawi, 2022). Presumably, consumers convey organic food brands' experiences and information via e-WOM communication. Hence, it enables such brands to be a targeting option for consumers and others that may build and enhance brand loyalty. In addition, quality characterizes organic food, and how the consumer positively perceives it is a critical factor in increasing brand loyalty towards organic and enriching the link between e-WOM communication and brand loyalty. Therefore, this study strives to pinpoint the nexus of the electronic word-of-mouth variable with brand loyalty mediated by perceived quality focusing on organic food products. Hopefully, it will contribute to filling the literature gap on these topics with meaningful results.

2. Literature Framework

2.1 e-WOM Communication

There is rapid growth in Internet users, digital marketing is fast developing, and businesses and consumers will increasingly rely on digital marketing practices. One of the prevalent famous tools in digital marketing is e-WOM communication, which refers to companies' willingness (De Keyzer, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2021) or consumers' willingness (Sukaris, Hartini & Mardhiyah, 2019) to share and talk about their experiences with others on online platforms (Şehirli, 2021) through written texts, pictures, videos, or even electronic applications (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Thus, e-WOM is a marketing tool that encourages customers to share their personal product-use informational experiences with others (Nuzula & Wahyudi, 2022). Observably, e-WOM assists in communicating brand-related information to a large mass audience. Besides, it offers faster online information transmission between users (Huete-Alcocer, 2017) due to its effectiveness (Nuzula & Wahyudi, 2022) and is beneficial because it is available (Nuseir, 2019).

The e-WOM communication can reach a considerable variety of people, regardless of whether these people already know one another, and reviews on websites aggregate numerous examples

of e-WOM every day and make them quickly available to everybody (Abdullah, Febrian, Perkasa, Wuryandari, & Pangaribuan, 2023). Anubha and Shome (2021) outlined that e-WOM facets are e-WOM quantity, e-WOM credibility, and e-WOM quality. Accordingly, e-WOM aspects of branded organic food are composed of reading others' online reviews to know which type to purchase, consulting others online for choices, and taking the online reviewers' opinions on the Internet to shop.

2.2 Perceived Quality

Product quality has always been a critical element for consumers to focus on (Sun, Huang, Fang, & Yan, 2022) and a deciding factor for consumers to regard (Wang, 2017) because it is a set of attributes associated with consumer perceptions of a product or brand quality (Kurniawan & Indriani, 2018). Notable, consumers usually tend to buy high-quality products because they have unique characteristics, and they will certainly not feel satisfied with the quality characteristics except through the perceived product quality process. In particular, consumers will assess the perceived quality of a product from their prior buying experience (Sinta, Lumbanraja, & Sembiring, 2023). In addition, perceived quality indicates the customer's emotional evaluation of the overall product excellence and superiority relative to their expectations and competing options (Ahmadian, Sahraei, & Khosro, 2023).

Several indicators represented perceived quality, which for this study are high product quality, preference for characteristics over other foods, and taking the initiative to advise others and signal the distinctive properties are perceived quality indicators of organic food. In addition, consumers have increasingly become concerned about food quality, safety, and environmental friendliness due to several environmental concerns and food safety incidents with recognized health benefits that lead to their purchases. (Apaolaza, Hartmann, D'Souza, & López, 2018; Migliore, 2021)

2.3 Brand Loyalty

The concept of loyalty is a complex psychological phenomenon that influences consumer behavior. According to Berry, Lewis, and Sowden (2021), the brand is both a psychological process that affects behavior and a behavior that is processed psychologically. Notable, nevertheless, the negative backlash on social media loyalty also entangles a strong feeling of assistance that drives a customer to stay faithful to a brand (Willis, 2021). Manisa and Sari (2023) reported that a brand is the guarantee of a mutual agreement and quality between the company and the customer. It also creates connections and anticipations close to the product by sharing its weight, benefits, and linked personality to generate desired self-images in the minds of consumers. Such connections are vital in building brand loyalty, which signifies a customer's choice to reprise the purchase of a favored product, compelled by the substantial development and praising emotional affinities with a distinct brand (Hung, Cheng, & Chiu, 2019). These findings underline the significance of comprehending the psychological processes that underscore consumer behavior and brand loyalty. Businesses invest in building strong connections with their consumers through social media to reap the rewards of increased loyalty and long-term success.

Eventually, according to Choi, Ok, and Hyun (2017), there are three indicators to create attitudinal loyalty that motivates recommending products, protecting the product brand, and trusting the product brand. Likewise, some indicators that can influence behavioral loyalty refer to repurchasing brand products and continuing to use the product brand as the principal preference. However, loyalty consists of attitudinal, behavioral, and composite loyalty.

Therefore, brand loyalty manifested a consistent attitude toward purchasing a preferred brand and generates repeat purchases of a specific product or service (Achmadi, Eviana, Soerjanto, & Widiarto, 2023). However, brand loyalty is not only confined and defined by repurchase incentive but also related emotionally and psychologically (Wongsunopparat & Klinpong, 2022). Notable, most authors (Gürlek, Düzgün, Meydan Uygur, & 2017; Choi & La, 2013) have assessed customer loyalty as a single dimension.

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1 e-WOM and Perceived Quality

e-WOM communication tool is a new tendency consumers use to share experiences and information to make them effortlessly and efficiently available. Thus, e-WOM communication exchanges marketing information between consumers to help in shaping their behavior and change their attitudes toward products and services as long e-WOM is a behavioral outcome (Bushara, Abdou, Hassan, Sobaih, Albohnayh, Alshammari, Aldoreeb, Elsaed, & Elsaied, 2023). In addition, there is a boost of e-WOM power in affecting consumers' attitudes and behaviors, particularly in the world of the rapid penetration of social networking websites among consumers (Alharbi, Kang, & Sohaib, 2016; Akyüz, 2013; Sohaib & Kang, 2015). Accordingly, consumers communicate, recommend, and exchange experiences by posting, commenting, referencing, and analyzing electronic service reviews (Sukaris, Hartini & Mardhiyah, 2019). Previous studies revealed a link between e-WOM and brand loyalty (Malia & Setiadi, 2023). Additionally, there is a positive and significant influence of e-WOM on brand loyalty (Eze, Nnabuko, & Etuk, 2014; Severi, Ling, & Nasermodeli, 2014; Sinta, Lumbanraja, & Sembiring, 2023). Hence, reclining on the above results and arguments, this study hypothesizes the following:

H₁: *E-WOM communication has a significant impact and relationship with perceived quality.*

3.3 E-WOM and Brand Loyalty

There is increasing Internet usage, which provides opportunities for consumers to promote their brands or products by exploiting the quick reach of e-WOM communication to offer solutions for them to affect their attitudes and behavior concerning loyalty. Thus, e-WOM communication exchanges marketing information between consumers to help in shaping their behavior and change their attitudes toward products and services as long e-WOM is a behavioral outcome (Bushara, Abdou, Hassan, Sobaih, Albohnayh, Alshammari, Aldoreeb, Elsaed, & Elsaied, 2023). In addition, there is a boost of e-WOM power in affecting consumers' attitudes and behaviors, particularly in the world of the rapid penetration of social networking websites among consumers (Alharbi, Kang, & Sohaib, 2016; Akyüz, 2013; Sohaib & Kang, 2015). Accordingly, consumers communicate, recommend, and exchange experiences by posting, commenting, referencing, and analyzing electronic service reviews (Sukaris, Hartini & Mardhiyah, 2019). Previous studies revealed a link between e-WOM and brand loyalty (Malia & Setiadi, 2023). Additionally, there is a positive and significant influence of e-WOM on brand loyalty (Budiman, 2021; Eze, Nnabuko, & Etuk, 2014; Severi, Ling, & Nasermodeli, 2014; Sinta, Lumbanraja, & Sembiring, 2023; Syahrivar & Ichlas, 2018). Hence, reclining on the above results and arguments, this study hypothesizes the following:

H₂: *e-WOM communication has a significant impact and relationship with brand loyalty towards organic food.*

3.3 Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty

Manisa and Sarı (2023) noted it is interesting to know that perceived quality is related to consumers' emotional feelings towards a brand, which includes their objectives, expectations, and differences. Similarly, brand loyalty is an essential marketing tool for companies and brands to build long-term consumer links in today's highly competitive market circumstances (Dülek & Saydan, 2019). Notable, consumers do not presume about product quality and opt to purchase brands due to quality assurance (Juan & Chenhong, 2020; Sun, Huang, Fang, & Yan, 2022). Therefore, several studies confirmed a statistical nexus between perceived quality and brand loyalty (Hwang, Lee, Park, & del Pobil, 2021; Syahrivar & Ichlas, 2018). Additionally, studies affirmed that there was a significant impact of perceived quality on brand loyalty (Aquinia, Soliha, Liana, & Wahyudi, 2021; Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Vazifehdost & Negahdari, 2018). Henceforth, reclining on the above results and arguments, this study hypothesizes the following:

H₃: *Perceived quality has a significant impact and relationship with brand loyalty towards organic food.*

3.4 Mediation Role of Perceived Quality

In e-WOM communication, consumers voluntarily share their experiences, talk about, and recommend to each other an individual or group shopping experience for a product brand to provide personal information (Verma & Dewani, 2021). Notable, positive WOM communication is crucial and effective in influencing actual or potential attitudes and behavior of consumers. Accordingly, Sohaib and Kang (2015) confirmed that the use of e-WOM influences consumers' attitudes and behaviors. It seems acceptable that the appearance of the brand on online platforms may increase brand loyalty. Thus, Azis, Syarifah, and Lisdiantini (2023) found that e-WOM significantly and positively affects brand loyalty.

Notably, several factors create consumer loyalty, and product quality is among them as long it meets or exceeds expectations. Thus, scientific investigations have pointed out that brand-perceived quality affects brand loyalty (Aquinia, Soliha, Liana, & Wahyudi, 2021). Therefore, the quality of products and the pursuit of raising positive product perception levels of consumers remains a critical goal for companies in building and enhancing consumer brand loyalty, especially when the product brand is organic, as it indicates quality. Accordingly, organic food can shape consumer attitudes, intentions, and behavior and dominate the conversation across traditional and electronic media platforms. Hence, reclining on the above results and arguments, this study hypothesizes the following:

H₄: *There is a mediating role of perceived quality on the relationship between e-WOM communication and organic food brand loyalty.*

2.7 Theoretical Model

Reclining on the literature and previous findings, Figure 1 provides a theoretical basis for building the study theoretical model that has presented the study hypotheses and finally suggests the mediation role of PQ on the relationship between e-WOM communication and BL.

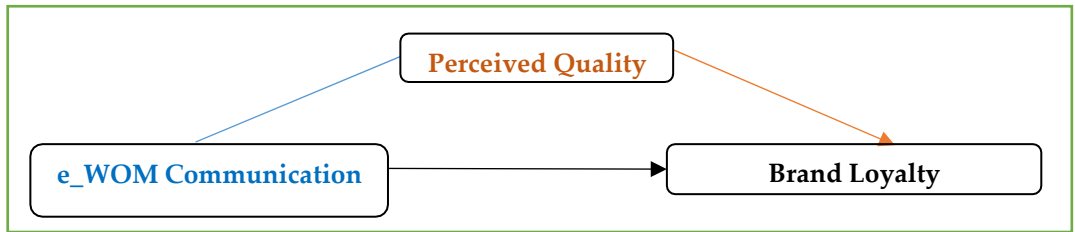


Figure 1: Theoretical Model of the Study.

H₁H₃

H₂

Source: The Researchers, 2023.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Method

The study analytically used a descriptive method considering the quantitative research design and collected secondary data from past research and study results; besides the relevant literature on the studied variable of study together with surveying to collect primary data via questionnaires, the study utilized various statistical techniques and tools based on the designed questionnaire weighted responses according to Likert scale.

3.2 Sample

The study population consists of all consumers of organic foods in the south Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in the Asir region, which has a population of 2,024,290 persons. Due to the large size and spread of the population and the difficulty of reaching all its members regarding the study variables, the study used a non-probabilistic design method by focusing on a convenience sampling design utilizing a self-selection sampling approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016) of 435 consumers of organic food at Asir region in KSA. Additionally, the study used snowball sampling depending on the interpersonal relationships of sample participants to help fine-tune the distribution of the questionnaire and increase the participants by ensuring that the sample met the characteristics of having regular and occasional purchasing and consuming of organic food, possessing smart Internet devices, and using Internet services. Notable, the advice was to send the questionnaire to those who had appropriate knowledge and education.

The lowest sample size needed for this study could be 140 participants, as the study included 14 survey items (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014), and when the number of the variables equals three, the study sample equals 45 participants (Stevens, 1996). Exceeding the highest guidance number of the sample size table (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), which suggested at least 384 participants for the sample. Accordingly, the study extended the sample size to confirm the creditable generalization covering the 435 participants. Notable, the chosen sample knows and deals with organic food. Digesting educational statuses could be noteworthy main socio-demographic characteristics with long-lasting forecasts on perceived health concerns and food consumption-related issues in the long run (Tsakiridou, Boutsouki, Zotos, & Mattas, 2008).

3.3 Measurement Instrument & Data Collection

The study adopted a designed online questionnaire administered and developed to minimize missing responses in an online survey, as a convenient and feasible technique for collecting and

managing data in the context of a targeted sample. Based on the various previous studies and literature related to the study issues, the study developed the questionnaire items constructs of a five-point Likert scale, which meanders from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). The personal data of the questionnaire were five items, including gender, age, social status, nationality, and job. In addition, in this study, three items for every pivotal variable were e-WOM communication, BL, and PQ. As for e-WOM communication, the items development of the questionnaire based on (Kajtazi & Zeqiri, 2020; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012); as for BL, the items based on (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005); and as for PQ, the items based on (Anselmsson, Burt, & Tunca, 2017; Wang, Pham, & Dang 2020). For data collection, a copy of the initial questionnaire was to 40 business administration and marketing academicians for technical reviews on the questionnaire design to benefit from their views and to see the initial reliability of questionnaire items for further improvement in the final questionnaire version. Three months after the distribution process, the data collection of the questionnaire responses reached 435 respondents, representing the sample size of this study.

3.4 Statistical Tools

Of course, the study exhibited the frequencies, means, and standard deviations to describe the sample personal data and rank the studied variables adopting the bases of 1- 1.80 (*Very Low*), 1.81-2.40 (*Low*), 2.41-3.20 (*Average*), 3.21-4.20 (*High*), and 4.21-5 (*Very High*). The study employed several statistical techniques and tools for analyzing the collected data using *SPSS* and *Amos* for hypotheses testing via structural equation modeling. Thus, the study followed several steps, which are confirmative factor analysis to assess the item's reliability and validity via *Cronbach's Alpha* and Composite Reliability (*CR*) measurement and the validity of the data by Average Variance Extracted (*AVE*) and Criterion Validity (*CV*), besides to know the statistical loading observed and latent variables positions. Further, the structural model analysis assessed the fitness of the model. Besides, the path analysis estimated a structural model for testing the different statistically significant impacts and correlations of the studied variables, and lastly, knowing the mediation functional role of the PQ construct on e-WOM and BL nexus.

3.5 Sample Profile Description

The respondents' data profile displayed that the studied sample's dominant gender was male category 66.4%. Besides, the nationality of not Saudis overlooked the studied sample equals 67.8%. Additionally, 51.7% of the respondents were aged 40 < 50 years. The sample domination was for those in a continuing marriage with children 74.7%. Lastly, the regularly and occasionally organic food consumer represented 64.4.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Variables Descriptive Analysis

In Table 1, the statistical means of e-WOM communication (independent) and BL (dependent) variables are at moderate levels, whereas the PQ (mediator) mean signaled a very high level. In addition, the correlations of the variables were 0.541 and 0.546 (moderates) of e-WOM communication to PQ and BL. However, the correlation between PQ and BL was 0.723, which was a strong correlation.

In this study, the structural model evaluated the theoretical model reliability, validity, and model goodness fit indices checked in Figure 1. In line with measuring reliability, the study used

Cronbach α (coefficient) to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire in Table 2. The achieved results of the overall scale coefficient value Was > 0.70 ($\alpha = 0.880$). Besides, the subscale coefficient values were also greater than 0.70 ($\alpha = 0.840$ for e-WOM, $\alpha = 0.800$ for PQ, and $\alpha = 0.872$ for BL). However, Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson (2014) proposed 0.70 for the lower limits of Cronbach α ; the measure will accept the value of 0.60. Eventually, all calculated coefficients are above the generally accepted value of 0.70. Therefore, all reliability scales proved good acceptance levels that meet adequate reliability suggestions.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Studied Variables & Correlations.

Variables	Means	Standard deviations	Levels	Correlations		
				Values	Rank	e-WOM
e-WOM Communication	3.268	1.034	Moderate	1	0.541**	0.546**
Perceived Quality (PQ)	3.980	0.757	High		1	0.723***
Brand Loyalty (BL)	3.303	1.043	Moderate			1
TOTAL	3.516	0.779				

Source: Processed Data of Field Study, 2023.

4.2 Model Fitness, Reliability, and Validity Analysis

Sig. P-value = 0.000 CMIN/DF = 1.532 CFI = 0.967 TLI = 0.950
 RMSEA = 0.079IFI = 0.968 GFI = 0.919 NFI = 0.913

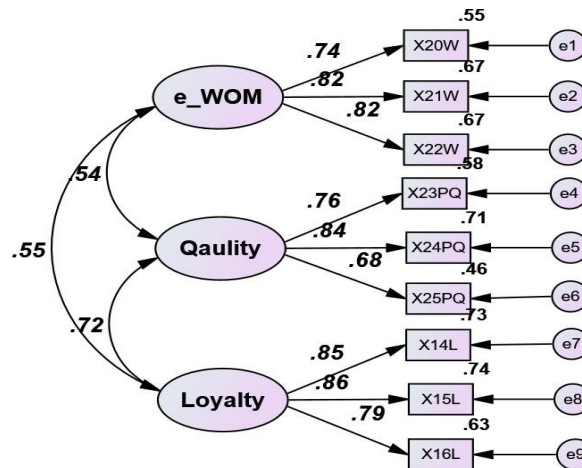


Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Source: Processed Data of Field Study, 2023.

Respecting the study's confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) via AMOS, likely all-around model fitness was good. Additionally, all loading of eight study items scored 0.74 and above except item 6 (X25PQ) of 0.68 in Figure 2, which indicated good loading factors. Similarly, in Table 2, the overall Composite Reliability (CR) was 0.80, and the lowest CR of constructs scored 0.81,

which meant good internal consistency and reliability. As for validity measurement assessment in Table 2, constructs of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all variables scored higher than 0.50, indicating convergent constructs validity fulfilling the adequacy (Fornell & Larker, 1981), besides the Criterion Validity is 0.938. The discriminant validation in Table 2 also indicated that the diagonal square root of the AVE value for the constructs stood higher than the underlying correlation value of other constructs in off diagonal (Fornell & Larker, 1981), achieving discriminant validity over 0.5 and all estimates were significant, in which the smallest value was 0.764.

Table 2: Results of Reliability Analysis, Validity Analysis, and Model Fit Indices

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	e-WOM	PQ	BL
e-WOM Communication	0.840	0.840	0.631	0.794		
Perceived Quality (PQ)	0.800	0.810	0.583	0.541**	0.764	
Brand Loyalty (BL)	0.872	0.870	0.700	0.546**	0.723***	0.840
TOTAL	0.880	0.80				
Category	Model Fit Indices, Measures, and Standards					
	Fit Indices	Model Measures	Standards	Decision		
Parsimonious Fit	X ² /df	1.532	< 3	Good		
	Chi-Square	36,774	< 149,885	Good		
Incremental Fit	CFI	0.967	> 0.900	Good		
	IFI	0.968	> 0.900	Good		
	TLI	0.95	≥ 0.900	Good		
	NFI	0.913	> 0.900	Good		
Absolute Fit	GFI	0.919	> 0.900	Good		
	RMSEA	0.079	< 0.080	Good		
	Standardized RMR	0.000	< 0.080	Good		

Source: Processed Data of Field Study, 2023. *Note.* * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.001$

The CFA in Table 2 results implied a CMIN/DF of 1,532 with a significant P -value of 0.046, CFI of 0.967, IFI of 0.968, GFI of 0.919, TLI of 0.950, NFI of 0.913, SRMR) of 0.000, and RMSEA of 0.079, which indicate that all data corresponding to the achieved indicators fitted a minimum good model of the studied theoretical model. Accordingly, the measurement fitness indicators of the model were acceptable. Therefore, the measurement indicators of the model fit the acceptance.

The study used a structural equation modeling to analyze the direct and indirect study relationships as in Table 3 and Figure 3 path analysis results summarized e-WOM communication direct result was positively and statistically significant towards PQ ($\beta = 0.34$; CR = 4.917; p -value = 0.001). Accordingly, when e-WOM communication increases by one standard deviation, the PQ increases by 0.34. Therefore, the result supported H₁. In addition, the e-WOM communication direct result was positive and statistically significant towards BL of organic food ($\beta = 0.24$; CR = 2.561; p -value = 0.010). Accordingly, when e-WOM communication increases by one standard deviation, the BL of organic food increases by 0.24. Hence, the result supported H₂. Lastly, the PQ direct result was positively and statistically significant on BL of organic food ($\beta = 0.70$; CR = 5.451; p -value = 0.001) Table 3 and Figure 3. Consequently, when PQ grows by one standard deviation unit, BL of organic food rises by 0.70. Accordingly, the result supported H₃.

4.3 Hypotheses Testing Results of Direct & Indirect Relationships

Table 3: Path Coefficients of Direct and Indirect Hypotheses Testing Toward Mediation.

No.	Relationship Tested		Std. Est. B	Se.	C.R.	P-Value	Decision Sig. (P < 0.05)
	Independent & Mediator	Path Dependent					
1	e-WOM	→ PQ	0.340	0.070	4.917	0.001	Supported
2	e-WOM	→ BL	0.240	0.093	2.561	0.010	Supported
3	PQ	→ BL	0.700	0.128	5.451	0.001	Supported

Source: Processed Data of Field Study, 2023. *Note.* * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

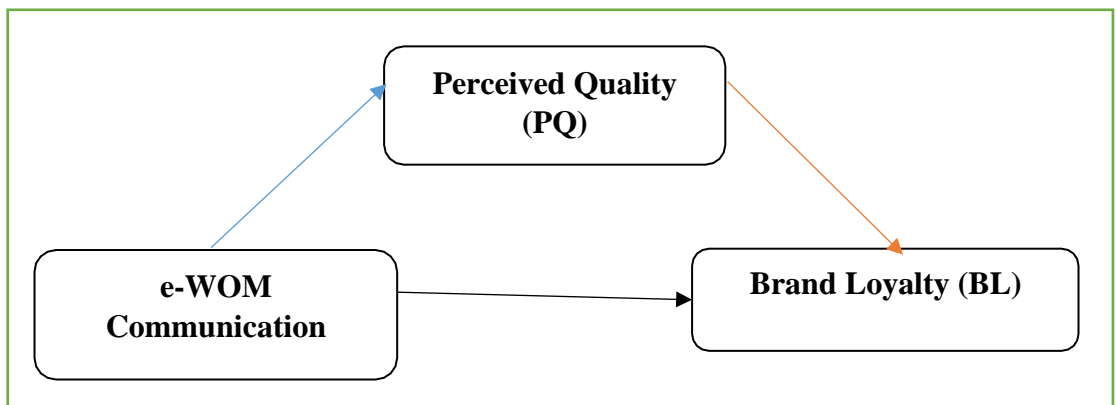


Figure 3: Model of the Study.

0.34 0.70

0.24

Source: Processed Data of Field Study, 2023.

The indirect effect analysis of the model confirmed the partial mediation of health consciousness, as long as a direct regression effect of e-WOM communication resulted in influencing BL of organic food of 0.24 with a P -value of 0.010 compared to the total effect metric of the same relationship equal 0.478. Therefore, the result insinuated that PQ partially mediated the relationship between e-WOM communication and BL of organic food, which implied e-WOM communication indirect consequence on BL of organic food via PQ. Accordingly, the result supported H_4 .

5. Results Discussion

The study results support all suggested hypotheses to the extent that the conclusion vouchsafes that perceived quality partially mediates the relationship between e-WOM communication and brand loyalty focusing on organic food. Notably, the present study's first result shows a positive and significant influence of e-WOM communication on perceived quality. This result signals that the consumers' activities related to e-WOM communication trickle down positively in increasing the consumers' perceived quality. Hence, perceived quality increases whenever there is e-WOM communication concerning organic food brands.

Therefore, this first result agrees with the findings of the previous studies (Eze, Nnabuko, & Etuk, 2014; Severi, Ling, & Nasermodeli, 2014; Shaista, Mariam, & Nisar, 2016; Syahrivar &

Ichlas, 2018; Vinh, Thanh, Ngan, & Phuong, 2021). A reason for this result might be the e-WOM communication aspects in which consumers tend to read others' online reviews to get an idea of which type of product to purchase, consult with others online for choices, and consider the opinions of online reviewers on the Internet to shop. These aspects may influence the product brand's perceived quality by creating a preference for specific characteristics over other options and even encouraging consumers to advise others and signal the distinctive properties of the product. Quality is a core element to alert consumers' attention to the branded product for its favorable experience he lives. Thus, consumers of good experiences with a seller are likely to engage in positive WOM, reuse the service, and vigorously suggest people buy products online from the companies (Duarte, Silva, & Ferreira, 2018). Therefore, Liu & Lee (2016) revealed an increase in consumers' perceived quality and value results in a favorable WOM recommendation to others.

In the second result, e-WOM communication continues influencing brand loyalty regarding organic food, which means e-WOM communication, has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty centering on organic food. Hence, the higher the e-WOM communication activities, the higher brand loyalty is achieved concerning organic food. This result goes in line with the results of previous studies (Bismoaziiz, Suhud, & Saparuddin, 2021; Budiman, 2021; Eze, Nnabuko, & Etuk, 2014; Malia & Setiadi, 2023; Praharjo, Wilopo, & Kusumawati, 2016; Putra, Himawati, Suzana, & Oktavilantika, 2023; Sinta, Lumbanraja, & Sembiring, 2023; Severi, Ling, & Nasermodeli, 2014; Vinh, Thanh, Ngan, & Phuong, 2021). The attribution of this result may be that consumers have relied recently on online reviews to determine which products to buy. It is also interesting to note how these reviews influence brand loyalty and consumer commitment. Accordingly, when consumers find a brand they like through positive e-WOM communication, they stick with it and actively seek it out. Therefore, marketers benefit when selling products from reviews published on the Internet because consumers tend to share them and share them with other people, which makes them willing to buy the same products with the same brand. Hence, it is the reason behind the influence of e-WOM on brand loyalty (Budiman, 2021).

Further, the third result strengthens that there is a positive significant effect of perceived quality on brand loyalty concerning organic food. This result indicates the higher the perceived quality, the higher the brand loyalty. This result copes with the previous studies (Aquinia, Soliha, Liana, & Wahyudi, 2021; Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Vazifehdoost & Negahdari, 2018). It seems like the quality perception of a product can have a significant impact on brand loyalty. If the perception of a product as having high quality and unique characteristics, it can foster consumer loyalty recognition and commitment towards the brand. Thus, it can lead to consumers choosing the brand as their first option under any circumstances and actively seeking it out in their search for similar products.

For confirmation, there is a perceived quality impact on brand loyalty concerning organic food, but such an influence is not complete concerning the e-WOM communication and brand loyalty nexus. Therefore, this study affirms partial mediation of perceived quality on the e-WOM communication and brand loyalty related to organic food brands. The reasoning link of the partial mediation result of perceived quality might be due to the high product quality offered to consumers who often favor products with unique characteristics compared to other products and take the initiative to advise other consumers about these distinctive attributes. Accordingly, the quality perception reflects on consumers engaging in e-WOM communication facets by reading online reviews, consulting with peers about their product choices, and

considering the opinions of online reviewers before making a purchase. Ultimately, it relates to brand loyalty and recognition promotion and leads to brand consumers' commitment as their first option to the brand, even if they have to search for it everywhere. The reason for consumer loyalty's occurrence to the brands is the consequence of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the brand that gets continuously in addition to the perception of product quality (Sulivyo & Ekasari, 2021).

To be precise, organic foods and their brands deserve to convey their information and share knowledge about them through the publicly available e-WOM communication tool, as many studies have confirmed their quality and benefit, and the growing consumer perceptions of this quality and their brands prompt the consumers to transmit and receive the information to increase loyalty to the organic foods brand.

6. Implications

The findings of this study can contribute to a better acquaintance of e-WOM communication facets effects on the composite brand loyalty (attitudinal and behavioral) concerning organic food and as they are healthy, safer, and convincing brands for human health accompanied by their perceived quality to the branded products. Thus, the concentration of the study was to display the nexus of e-WOM communication and brand loyalty regarding organic food brands mediated by perceived quality. Moreover, the results may expand the academic studies and the knowledge of similar research fields. Therefore, the findings pave the way for the researchers to make rigorous and deeper investigations regarding e-WOM communication influences, foster an understanding of perceived quality roles, and loyalty to organic food brands as options with their various properties for consumers.

In addition, the findings may encourage the researchers to deal with specifying certain organic food brands for research in other KSA areas or other geography. Finally, the originality/value of this study is that it is the first study in the KSA to look conspicuously and jointly at the three variables of e-WOM communication, brand loyalty, and perceived quality focusing on organic food. Practical-wise, the study findings benefit consumers with the studied variables' effect when consuming branded organic food. In addition, alert producers and marketers in KSA while planning their marketing policies, strategies, and campaigns roles of e-WOM communication and perceived quality in igniting brand loyalty to help foster the various stakeholders' benefits.

7. Study Limitations and Scope for Future Research

This study's results broaden understanding of the mediating role of perceived quality in the nexus of e-WOM and brand loyalty regarding organic food, and allow potential studies to appear in the future. However, this study suffers limitations that may influence its generalization as long as it concentrates only on organic food without selecting specific brands. Although the various participants' nationalities portrayed the sample, the study did not scrutinize the sample's characteristics to test the statistical differences respecting the variables. In addition, the sample study was mandated only to regular and occasional consumers of organic food in the Asir region area in the South of KSA and disregarded consumers in other region areas. However, the result may be generalizable in KSA because of the similarities among consumers, but the results may not be generalizable to the full extent in other countries. Accordingly, future research should replicate this research model considering other areas and

variables like e-WOM communication with brand-related variables. In addition, it is desirable to concentrate on specific organic food brands accompanying the sample's personal characteristics differences and engaging in-depth qualitative inquiry supported by a quantitative approach.

8. Conclusion

The testimonial digital marketing development depends highly on Internet services has yielded the e-WOM communication tool via which the consumers exchange their brand quality experiences and share their perceived quality information reflecting brand attitudinal and behavioral loyalty considering organic food as a brand for its quality properties and the safety and health aspects. This study presented the first two main results associated with the direct effect of e-WOM communication (main-independent variable) on perceived quality (dependent variable) and brand loyalty (dependent variable). Worth noting, perceived quality converted to a sub-independent variable to eventually play a mediation role in the e-WOM and brand loyalty nexus.

The conduct of the study was in 2023 year in the Asir region in the South Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This study selected a sample of regular and occasional consumers of organic food. Generally, KSA is fertile land for research as it is a strong emerging economy in which many different national and international businesses of organic food struggle to survive in a highly competitive market characterized by financially well-off consumers. This paper endeavors to fill the gap in the current literature and body of knowledge by providing research proof that perceived quality mediates the relationship between e-WOM communication and brand loyalty toward organic food; accordingly, businesses should plan strategies vigilantly to promote the studied variables' roles. Further research in this field is imperative to gain comprehensive perspicuity of e-WOM communication, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

Authors Contributions

Dr. Farah presented the research idea with the assistance of Dr. Reda. Dr. Farah, Dr. Reda, Dr. Mamoun, and Dr. Fatima developed and conceptualized the idea. Dr. Farah, Dr. Reda, and Dr. Mamoun wrote the first draft. Dr. Farah and Dr. Reda invited Dr. Sami and Dr. Falah to join the proposal group and participate in the first draft discussion. All authors surveyed the literature to develop the theoretical model. Dr. Farah, Dr. Reda, and Dr. Farah developed the methodology and research design plan verified by Dr. Mamoun, Dr. Fatima, and Dr. Falah. Dr. Sami and Dr. Fatima administrated the field study of the project to collect and enter data using SPSS under the supervision of Dr. Farah and Dr. Reda. Again, Dr. Reda, Dr. Farah, and Dr. Sami performed the formal analysis and interpretation. All authors discussed the results and suggested improvements. Dr. Farah, Dr. Reda, and Dr. Mamoun wrote the first version of the manuscript with the consultation and assistance of all authors. All authors reviewed and edited the final manuscript of the project.

Conflict of Interest ST

The authors of the article "Impact of e-WOM on Brand Loyalty of Organic Food: Mediating Role of Perceived Quality" declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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