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Analyzing the Influence of eWOM on Customer Perception of Value and Brand Love in Hospitality Enterprise

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Abstract: Studying brand love is vital for hospitality establishments because it helps them understand their customers' feelings and perceptions toward their brands, especially with the growing number of hospitality brands. However, previous hospitality research has neglected the relationship between customer value and brand love. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of customer value on brand love of fast-food restaurants with a moderating role of electronic word of mouth. The research model was empirically evaluated on 385 fast-food restaurant brand customers in Greater Cairo, Egypt, who had previously participated in restaurants' online communities. We used structural equation modeling to examine the research data. Results indicated that customer value is crucial in increasing brand love sub-dimensions (i.e., intimacy, passion, and commitment). The results also confirmed that the utilitarian value affects more than the hedonic value of brand love sub-dimensions, and the latter significantly impacted customer loyalty. In addition, electronic word of mouth moderated the relationship between the two types of customer value and brand love sub-dimensions. Hence, the current study adds a new factor (i.e., customer value) that affects the brand love of restaurants to the hospitality literature. Accordingly, the study will present several practical implications to increase customer value and, thus, brand love and customer loyalty.

Keywords: brand love intimacy; brand love passion; brand love commitment; hedonic value; utilitarian value; customer loyalty; hospitality industry; fast-food restaurant

1. Introduction

The fast-food restaurant industry contributes significantly to employment creation, tourism, and overall economic growth in Egypt [1]. The Egyptian fast-food restaurant industry is a highly competitive market [1], so to stand out, restaurants must establish a strong brand love to develop customer loyalty. Carroll and Ahuvia [2] defined brand love as the degree to which a satisfied customer feels strongly connected to a particular brand. Brand love is customers' emotional connection with a restaurant's brand, and it can be a very effective way to keep customers returning and boost sales [3]. In today's digital economy, online evaluations published by a brand lover are more likely to draw a

wider audience than those with less emotional substance [4]. Hence, the first motive for our study is to study the factors that make customers love the restaurant brand to attract more loyal customers.

Prior brand love studies in hospitality concentrated on multiple research streams [3,5,6]. Kwon and Mattila [7] of the hospitality field stated that self-brand connection, emotional attachment, and word of mouth are the pillars upon which brand love rests. In a study on what factors influence a customer's decision to love a brand, Manthiou et al. [8] examined the perception of the brand's authenticity in a luxury hotel. Further, by focusing on the precursor of ideal-self-sub-brand congruence, Wang et al. [6] examined the connection between sub-brand love and corporate-brand love. Cognitive engagement is one form of customer-brand interaction that Shin and Back [9] looked at to determine if it was related to brand love. In addition, Kim et al. [5] discovered that brand modernity improves brand love, positively influencing intentions to use, word of mouth, and readiness to pay more. Anbumathi et al. [3] investigated the role of app design, personality, social influence, and service quality in building brand image and promoting brand love. However, limited research examined the impact of customer value on brand love in fast-food restaurants, especially in light of the digital economy, which resulted in a research gap and our second motive for the study.

Customer value refers to the perceived benefits of a restaurant's products and services compared to the cost and effort required to get them [10]. Hedonic value is the emotional and psychological benefits customers get from their experience with a brand [1]. Hedonic value includes the atmosphere, pleasant customer service, and pleasure that come from the sensory, emotional, and entertainment part of the experience. Utilitarian value refers to the practical benefits customers receive from their experience with a brand, including factors such as convenience, price, service, and food quality [11]. We predict customer value can impact brand love. For example, customers with positive hedonic experiences are more likely to forgive any mistakes or issues arising during their dining experience [12]. A brand's perceived utilitarian value can also affect customers' purchase of restaurant products and services. Customers may be more likely to purchase products and services from a brand they know and trust due to its perceived quality, price, and service [10]. The perceived value of a brand can also result in customers' emotional connection with the brand, which can lead to brand love [13]. This emotional connection drives loyalty and makes customers more committed to the brand in the long run, especially in the digital economy and eWOM [9].

The eWOM refers to any positive or negative statement made by a restaurant's potential, present, or previous customers regarding a product or service via the Internet [14]. Hence, eWOM effectively influences customer behavior, which means it can influence the customers' perceived value of a brand [15], thus affecting their brand love. The presence of positive eWOM can strengthen customer value perception, which further increases brand love. Further, eWOM can also create a strong emotional bond between the customers and the brand, which enhances the strength of customer value perception and thus increases the level of brand love [16]. Conversely, negative eWOM can weaken the relationship by decreasing brand love and customer value perception. Thus, the third motivation of our study is that eWOM could moderate the relationship between customer value and brand love.

Therefore, our research contributes in several ways to the theoretical literature on customer value, brand love, eWOM, and customer loyalty in fast-food restaurants. First, this study expands the brand love theory by proposing a vital factor (i.e., customer value) that can influence brand love. Second, we investigate whether giving customer value affects brand love in a digital economy where it is simpler for customers to examine the fast-food restaurant's electronic reviews of other customers. As a result, in the digital economy, providing value to customers will remain pivotal in fostering brand love. Thirdly, the research broadens the scope of studies examining the elements that influence customer loyalty. To elaborate, if customers perceive both hedonic and utilitarian values, they will

develop a stronger emotional connection to the brand and become more devoted to the restaurant brand. However, our findings add to the theoretical literature and offer fast-food restaurant brands practical implications for enhancing their customers' value. For instance, restaurants can increase hedonic value by providing customers with a pleasant atmosphere and experience. This can be accomplished by the provision of a warm and welcoming environment, the provision of first-rate customer service, and the provision of stimulating and entertaining activities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Love Theory

Brand love is the extent to which a satisfied customer feels emotionally attached to a brand [17]. Brand love consists of a collection of emotions, behaviors, and perceptions customers organize toward a brand [18]. When customers fall in love with a brand, they become devoted fans who spread positive word of mouth about the brand, have good opinions to convey, and are less likely to purchase competing products [19]. As a result, brand love is a strong predictor of essential outcomes like customers' willingness to make repeat purchases, the number of times they recommend a product to others, and their ability to ignore poor reviews [20]. Sternberg's [21] theory of brand love highlighted three components of excellent brand love: intimacy, passion, and commitment.

According to Hernandez Ortega and Ferreira [22], intimacy is the familiarity and closeness between a customer and a brand due to frequent, positive interactions. Brand intimacy can also be defined as the extent to which customers believe a brand cares about them and is eager to understand and meet their requirements [23]. A brand can accurately capture the wants and preferences of customers by communicating with them [24]. In addition, intimacy is the perception of bonding, connection, and closeness in a romantic relationship [6]. For instance, brand love intimacy refers to people creating an emotional connection with a brand, similar to how they might interact with an individual. This connection can be so strong that it builds brand loyalty and advocacy. Brand love intimacy emphasizes the need for marketers to develop an emotional relationship between their customers and their brand instead of focusing solely on product attributes and prices [25]. Therefore, several crucial components of brand love intimacy include trust, emotional connection, understanding, and shared values.

The passion component of a love relationship is defined as physical attraction and related sensations that drive romanticism in love [6]. Sternberg [21] said that passion is the romantic core of a relationship and shows strong feelings of attraction and longing. In contrast to the transient nature of passion, intimacy is based on accumulating knowledge [24]. Satisfying demands for self-esteem, nurturing, succulence, affiliation, obedience, domination, or self-actualization can lead to the perception of passion [21,26]. Customers' passion for a brand is stoked by experiences that leave them feeling strongly about the product or service [6,27]. While developing brand experiences, restaurateurs should arouse the visitors' multisensory emotions to arouse their affection for their establishments. Tangible and intangible factors, such as color, music, temperature, aroma, lighting, layout, design, personality, emotion, and texture, can arouse passion for a restaurant brand [28].

In contrast to intimacy and passion, commitment is a cognitive aspect of love that converts the encounter into a powerful and long-lasting partnership [6]. In Sternberg's [21] triangular theory of love, commitment refers to a person's moral obligation to a relationship, and moral commitment is an individual's conviction regarding maintaining a relationship. Ünal et al. [29] also defined brand love commitment as a psychological status of customers that is positively connected with attitudes toward the brand and a willingness to maintain a valued association with it. Customers' repeated desire to purchase a restaurant's goods and services demonstrates the restaurant's brand commitment [13]. Moreover, Sternberg [21] argued that these three factors work in tandem to generate brand love. Therefore, we will use Sternberg's [21] theory because it explains why customers create profound emotional connections with some brands. We also argue that if the fast-food restaurant brand improves

customer value in the digital economy (i.e., eWOM), this might be a great strategy to boost brand love and customer loyalty.

2.2. Customer Value and Brand Love

Fast-food restaurants' success depends on their ability to provide superior value to their customers [1]. Hence, customer value has been extensively explored and has attracted increased attention from academics and restaurant practitioners [10,30,31]. In the context of management and marketing, restaurants that highly emphasize customer value will have a sustained competitive edge [32]. According to Zeithaml et al. [33], customer value is an evaluation of benefits and sacrifices. Benefits are described as a combination of physical and service features [1]. Sacrifices are the money, time, and effort for having a particular product or a service [31]. Customer value quantifies the degree to which a customer perceives more benefits than drawbacks [34]. So, to provide value, restaurants must maximize customer benefits while minimizing customer sacrifices [35].

Babin et al. [36] stated that consumption activities could yield utilitarian and hedonic values. Utilitarian value is described as an entire evaluation of functional benefits that includes four factors: price reduction, service, time savings, and product selection [37]. As an efficient and functional value, utilitarian value is rational and aligned with the objectives [38]. Hedonic value based on emotional motivation refers to the excitement or joy that occurs while customers are involved in a shopping environment and examining a product. The emotional and irrational aspects are more vital than when customers obtain anything through shopping [39]. For instance, the aesthetics of a restaurant imply that the shopping procedure is pleasant or that customers can escape monotony by having a pleasant purchasing experience [40]. Therefore, utilitarian and hedonic values are essential to comprehending customers' evaluations of the customer experience, as they persist as an underlying presence throughout the consumption phenomena [1].

We argue that hedonic value can significantly impact all three dimensions of brand love, i.e., intimacy, passion, and commitment. When customers experience pleasure and enjoyment, joy, an improvement in mood, and excitement while interacting with a brand, it can create a positive emotional connection, leading to a stronger sense of intimacy. This emotional connection can lead to a perception of bonding, connection, and closeness, which are essential components of brand love intimacy [41,42]. Customers who feel emotionally connected to a brand are more inclined to purchase and suggest its products and services [43,44]. Moreover, the physical attraction and related sensations that drive romanticism in love, i.e., passion, can also be aroused by hedonic value. Tangible and intangible factors, such as color, music, aroma, lighting, layout, design, personality, emotion, and texture, can create experiences that leave customers feeling strongly about a brand. These experiences can lead to strong attraction and longing, essential components of brand love passion [45,46].

Finally, hedonic value can also influence brand love commitment. When customers experience pleasure and enjoyment, joy, an improvement in mood, and excitement while interacting with a brand, they are more likely to feel positively connected to the brand and have the willingness to maintain a valued association with it [43]. This willingness to maintain a valued association with a brand is an essential component of brand love commitment. Moreover, customers with a strong emotional connection to a brand may be more forgiving of any mistakes or shortcomings the company may have [47]. Customers who receive hedonic value from a restaurant's service or product are more likely to remain brand-committed over time [37]. Hence, we hypothesize:

H1a. *Hedonic value positively influences brand love intimacy.*

H1b. *Hedonic value positively influences brand love passion.*

H1c. *Hedonic value positively influences brand love commitment.*

The concept of utilitarian customer value depends on the idea that customers are interested in brands that offer them real, tangible benefits [48]. This utilitarian value can have a substantial effect on brand love. Customers who obtain good value from a product or service are likelier to establish an emotional attachment to the brand [49,50]. This connection can lead to enhanced customer commitment and approval, which can contribute to developing a strong and enduring customer-brand relationship [51]. In addition, utilitarian customer value can contribute to good word-of-mouth marketing, which can be important for promoting the restaurant and its products and services [52]. Hence, we hypothesize:

H2a. *Utilitarian value positively influences brand love intimacy.*

H2b. *Utilitarian value positively influences brand love passion.*

H2c. *Utilitarian value positively influences brand love commitment.*

2.3. The Moderator (eWOM)

The development of the internet has extended the concept of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication to online content known as eWOM, which can rapidly reach massive audiences [53]. The eWOM is all internet-based customer communications regarding using certain restaurants' products or services [15]. The eWOM is also defined as any positive or negative comment from prospective, current, or past customers about a product or restaurant and is made available to many individuals and organizations via the Internet [54]. Fast-food restaurant chains benefit from eWOM because it helps them to attract and retain customers, build a positive brand image, influence customer decision-making, be a cost-effective marketing tool, and allow real-time monitoring and response to customer feedback [15–25,28–34,36,37,39–43,45–57]. Customers of restaurants are more likely to do research in advance if they have little way of knowing the quality of the establishment's offerings until after they have made a purchase [56]. For this reason, restaurant reviews provide the information necessary for a customer to decide which restaurant to visit in advance. In general, eWOM comprises feedback from current or prior customers on restaurant value elements such as product quality, service quality, product impressions, price, dining experience, and reliability [1,57].

Customer value is thought to directly affect behavioral outcomes (e.g., eWOM) in most conceptual and empirical contributions to value research [58–60]. Customers' perceptions of value have a positive and statistically significant impact on electronic word-of-mouth and brand loyalty, as demonstrated by previous research [58]. According to Hollebeek et al. [59], perceived value is a crucial factor in customers' eWOM engagement, suggesting that customers' engagement behaviors follow their perceptions of value. In other words, customers are inclined to engage in behavioral intents when they perceive high levels of value in their consumption experiences. Based on this perspective, customer participation consists mainly of participation in eWOM-related actions, such as initiating and sharing reviews, suggestions, and referrals [15]. eWOM engagement is correlated with hedonic value because the sense of value through emotional and affective experiences may be antecedents of attitudes and behaviors. Regarding utilitarian value, online customers' searches for helpful information, creation of content, and willingness to trade content with other users are very helpful in promoting engagement and figuring out how engaged customers are in eWOM [60]. So, there is a direct link between customer value and eWOM since value includes both cognitive and emotional aspects.

Brand love results from positive feelings and experiences with a brand that generate favorable perceptions toward that brand [17,44]. With a positive attitude, customers are more likely to invest in long-term connections with the brand and spread the word about it to others [19,61]. Previous research has demonstrated that when customers receive good eWOM reviews, their brand love increases [16]. Customers like to get brand information via eWOM because they view it as genuine and authentic [62]. Karjaluoto et al. [16]

examined brand love as a predictor of WOM, whereas Pillay [62] examined brand love as an outcome of eWOM. Studying eWOM's role as a potential antecedent of brand love will help restaurants encourage the spread of positive eWOM, which may increase customer loyalty and retention.

We argue that in the current digital age, customers increasingly rely on internet reviews and recommendations from other customers when deciding where to eat [15]. Thus, eWOM is a valuable tool for restaurants to create brand love and attract new customers [19]. To maintain brand love, restaurant brands must provide their customers with products or services that provide hedonic value (e.g., joy, entertainment, pleasant atmosphere, superior customer service, and pleasure derived from the senses) and utilitarian value (e.g., convenience, affordable price, and quick service quality) [1]. Customers are more inclined to share their positive experiences via eWOM when they receive high levels of value from a restaurant's product or service. Positive experiences can boost customers' emotional and cognitive understanding of a brand, leading to a rise in brand love. Hence, we hypothesize:

H3a. *A positive eWOM moderates the relationship between hedonic value and brand love intimacy.*

H3b. *A positive eWOM moderates the relationship between hedonic value and brand love passion.*

H3c. *A positive eWOM moderates the relationship between hedonic value and brand love commitment.*

H4a. *A positive eWOM moderates the relationship between utilitarian value and brand love intimacy.*

H4b. *A positive eWOM moderates the relationship between utilitarian value and brand love passion.*

H4c. *A positive eWOM moderates the relationship between utilitarian value and brand love commitment.*

2.4. Brand Love and Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is greatly influenced by a restaurant's strong brand, especially in a digital economy [63]. In addition, in the highly competitive hospitality industry, customer loyalty is essential for expanding market share and profit [64]. Customer loyalty is a continuing, mutually beneficial connection between a business and a customer [65]. Customer loyalty refers to the extent to which a customer is committed and devoted to a particular brand or its products and services [66]. According to Evanschitzky [67], a loyal customer who purchases from the same brand regularly has a positive impression of that restaurant brand and encourages others to do the same. A restaurant's loyal customer base will result in improved profits, an enhanced price premium, and an increased number of recommendations [63,68].

Research in restaurants suggested that the primary factors influencing customer loyalty are perceived value, image, reputation, and perceived quality [64,68,69]. However, little research is investigating how brand love dimensions, including intimacy, passion, and commitment, affect customer loyalty in the restaurant business. Trivedi and Sama [63] established the effect of brand love on customer loyalty and emphasized the need to justify this relationship in various scenarios. They highlighted that monitoring this interaction is crucial, as customer loyalty is essential to the restaurant's success. Song et al. [70] found that affection for a coffee shop's brand is a factor that boosts brand loyalty. Shen et al. [13] propose that brand love created after dining at a fine dining restaurant improves customer referrals and intention to return. We argue that brand love is predicated on customers being likelier to a brand if they feel an intense emotional connection to the restaurant brand. This connection can be established through various strategies, including developing a compelling restaurant brand story, providing superior customer value, creating a customer

loyalty program, providing individualized customer service, providing special offers, and providing unique experiences. Based on the findings of prior research and the argument, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H5a. *Brand love intimacy positively influences customer loyalty.*

H5b. *Brand love passion positively influences customer loyalty.*

H5c. *Brand love commitment positively influences customer loyalty.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Constructs Measures

We relied on measures frequently used in previous studies to ensure their validity and reliability [6,36,71–74]. Firstly, the variables of hedonic and utilitarian values were adopted from [36,71], which were used to measure customer values. The hedonic value measurement looks at the good feelings, fun, and pleasure that customers experience when engaging with a restaurant's product or service. The scale also looks at the joy, improved mood, and excitement that customers experience when interacting with a restaurant's product or service. In contrast, customer utilitarian value measurement is a way to assess the practical benefits that customers experience when interacting with a product or service. The utilitarian value measurement looks at the convenience, economy, value for money, and quick service customers experience when engaging with a restaurant's products and services. Secondly, the brand love variables were adopted from Huber et al. [72] and Wang et al. [6]. The intimacy measurement looks at the emotional closeness, comfort, understanding, and building of intimacy customers experience when engaging with a restaurant's products and services. The passion measurement looks at the happiness, adoration, delight, and excitement that customers experience when engaging with a restaurant's products and services. The commitment measurement looks at commitment, continuing the relationship, and confidence in the relationship that customers experience when engaging with a restaurant's products and services. Thirdly, the eWOM variable was adopted from previous studies [73,74]. The eWOM measurement looks at how customers read other customers' online reviews, consult other customers' online reviews, gather information from customers' online reviews, and how customers' online reviews make them feel confident purchasing from a particular restaurant brand. Finally, customer loyalty was adopted from Lee and Kim [55]. The customer loyalty measurement looks at whether customers would choose the same restaurant again, encourage others to purchase from the same restaurant, and say positive things about the restaurant.

3.2. The Study Context and Data Collection

We collected data from customers of fast-food restaurant brands in Greater Cairo, Egypt. In Egypt, fast-food restaurant brands are getting increasingly popular [1]. Examples of popular brands include KFC, McDonald's, Hardee's, Burger King, and Pizza Hut. We used the self-administered questionnaire to collect data from restaurant customers. Before distributing the questionnaire, we translated the questionnaire from English into Arabic by specialists in the English language and specialists in the field of tourism and hospitality. In addition, there was a determinant for the selection of participating customers, which is that customers are familiar with the digital platforms of fast-food restaurants, in addition to reading and writing comments about their experience with the restaurants. We took about four months to collect customer data from September 2022 to December 2022. We used convenience sampling to select participants from fast-food restaurants, but we took into account that most of the brands of fast-food restaurants in Egypt are represented. Convenience sampling is a non-probability method in which participants are selected for inclusion based on their accessibility [75]. Customers participating in the study were told it was voluntary work for research and development in the fast-food restaurant sector in Egypt. The questionnaire consists of two parts; In the first part, the customer profile of the

fast-food restaurant (gender, age, marital status, and level of education) was presented. Part two contains a 5-point Likert scale used to assess all 32 study items (1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "disagree", 3 = "neutral", 4 = "agree", 5 = "strongly agree"). Four hundred and twenty questionnaires were distributed, and three hundred and eighty-six (*n* = 385) valid questionnaires were filled out, so the response rate was 91.6%.

3.3. Data Analysis

We used Amos software for structural equation modeling (SEM) testing of the conceptual model. SEM is a statistical method for assessing the relationships between variables. SEM describes and predicts the effect of one or more variables on a particular result [76]. The premise of SEM is that the observed variables are linked to unobservable latent variables. SEM comprises regression models, factor analysis, and path analysis. We utilize SEM because it is a powerful tool for testing complicated research hypotheses and estimating the strength and direction of correlations between variables.

Further, confirmatory factor analysis was used to evaluate if the manifest variables matched the predicted latent variables for multi-item constructs [77]. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were utilized to examine the consistency of each latent variable's construct. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was employed to examine the construct's convergent and discriminant validity. AVE measures the variance a construct captures concerning the amount of variance due to measurement error. A higher AVE indicates the construct is more reliable, while a lower AVE indicates the construct is less reliable. AVE should be greater than 0.50 to be considered reliable. After ensuring the accuracy of the measurements, hypotheses were tested using standardized path coefficients (ß) [78]. The regression-based moderation analysis technique created by Andrew F. Hayes [79] was utilized in this work using the Macro Process software. Andrew F. Hayes developed the statistical method of regression-based moderation analysis, allowing researchers to analyze the relationship between an independent and a dependent variable while accounting for the impact of one or more moderator factors.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Profile

The results presented in Table 1 show that the study had a relatively balanced gender distribution, with 48.7% of the participants being female and 51.3% being male. Most participants were young adults aged 18–39, with only 15% being 40 or older. This result is consistent with prior research indicating that most fast-food restaurant customers are youth [1]. Among those who participated, 51.5% had a bachelor's degree, 40.7% had only completed high school, and 7.8% had completed graduate school. In addition, 43.1% of respondents were single, 42.6% were married, and 14.3% were married with children. These demographic characteristics provide essential insights into the study's sample population and can help to contextualize the findings.

Table 1. Sample profile.

Characteristics	Descriptions	Statistics	(%)
Gender	Male	197	51.3
	Female	188	48.7
Age	18–28	135	35
	29–39	193	50
	40 or more	57	15
Education	Secondary school or below	157	40.7
	University degree	198	51.5
	Postgraduate (Diploma–Master–Ph.D.)	30	7.8
Marital status	Single	166	43.1
	Married	164	42.6
	Married with children	55	14.3

4.2. Measurement Model

Table 2 displays the reliability test (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) for each construct, examined between 0.91 and 0.95, over 0.70, representing the reliability of all variables [80]. The constructs' composite reliability ranges from 0.91 to 0.97, demonstrating that all constructs have significant internal reliability [81]. Every component with factor loadings greater than 0.50 was included in the assemblies. The AVE for each construct is greater than the squared correlations between the components in discriminant validity (see Table 3) [78].

Table 2. Measuring model analysis.

Describe Your Last Experience with a Fast-Food Restaurant Brand.	Item-to-Factor Loadings	AVE	CR	A
Hedonic value				
I ate out at this fast-food restaurant brand and felt good about it.	0.85			
Eating out at this fast-food restaurant brand was fun and pleasant.	0.85			
The dining experience at this fast-food restaurant brand was a joy.	0.86	0.74	0.93	0.94
The dining experience at this fast-food restaurant brand improved my mood.	0.86			
During the dining experience at this fast-food restaurant, I felt the excitement of searching for food.	0.88			
Utilitarian value				
Eating out at this fast-food restaurant brand was convenient.	0.86			
Eating out at this fast-food restaurant brand was pragmatic and economical.	0.88	0.74	0.91	0.93
Eating out at this fast-food restaurant brand was not a waste of money.	0.86			
Service at this fast-food restaurant brand was quick.	0.84			
Brand love intimacy				
I feel emotionally close to this fast-food restaurant brand.	0.86			
I have a cozy relationship with this fast-food restaurant brand.	0.86	0.75	0.92	0.92
I understand this fast-food restaurant brand.	0.87			
There is a certain intimacy between this fast-food restaurant brand and me.	0.88			
Brand love passion				
I cannot imagine another fast-food restaurant brand making me as happy as this brand.	0.89			
I adore this fast-food restaurant brand.	0.88	0.77	0.93	0.94
This fast-food restaurant brand makes me feel great delight.	0.90			
Just seeing this fast-food restaurant brand is exciting for me.	0.85			

Table 2. *Cont.*

Describe Your Last Experience with a Fast-Food Restaurant Brand.	Item-to-Factor Loadings	AVE	CR	A
Brand love commitment				
I am committed to maintaining my relationship with this fast-food restaurant brand.	0.86			
I plan to continue my relationship with this fast-food restaurant brand.	0.87	0.75	0.92	0.91
My relationship with this fast-food restaurant brand is a good decision.	0.88			
I have confidence in the stability of my relationship with this fast-food restaurant brand.	0.86			
Electronic word of mouth				
I often read other customers' online reviews to know what this fast-food restaurant brand makes good impressions on others.	0.926			
I often read other customers' online reviews to ensure I choose the right fast-food restaurant brand.	0.82			
I often consult other customers' online reviews to help them choose an attractive fast-food restaurant brand.	0.93	0.84	0.97	0.95
I frequently gather information from customers' online reviews before choosing a specific fast-food restaurant brand.	0.94			
I worry about my decision if I do not read customers' online reviews when I go to a fast-food restaurant brand.	0.92			
When I go to a fast-food restaurant, customers' online reviews make me confident in purchasing from this brand.	0.97			
Customer loyalty				
I want to choose this fast-food restaurant brand again in the month.	0.86			
I am willing to eat from this fast-food restaurant brand in the future.	0.88	0.75	0.92	0.93
I will encourage others to purchase from this fast-food restaurant brand.	0.90			
I would say positive things about this fast-food restaurant brand to others.	0.83			

Note: All factor loadings were significant at ≤ 0.001; CR = Composite Reliability (≥ 0.70); α = Alpha Reliability (≥ 0.70); AVE = Average Variance Extracted (≥ 0.50).

Table 3. Discriminant validity.

Constructs	Hedonic Value	Utilitarian Value	Brand Love Intimacy	Brand Love Passion	Brand Love Commitment	Electronic Word of Mouth	Customer Loyalty
Hedonic value	**0.86**						
Utilitarian value	0.66	**0.86**					
Brand love intimacy	0.55	0.65	**0.86**				
Brand love passion	0.57	0.49	0.66	**0.87**			
Brand love commitment	0.45	0.66	0.42	0.66	**0.86**		
Electronic word of mouth	0.44	0.26	0.52	0.68	0.55	**0.91**	
Customer loyalty	0.34	0.65	0.74	0.55	0.64	0.43	**0.86**

Note: all correlations are significant at $p < 0.001$.

Several fit indices were employed to evaluate how well the measurement model matched the data. The overall X^2 of the model is 1493, and its degree of freedom is 434 ($p < 0.001$). The adjusted goodness-of-fit value is 0.94, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value is 0.079, the goodness-of-fit value is 0.95, the comparative fit index value is 0.92, the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) value is 0.92, the standardized root means square residual (SRMR) value is 0.024, and the normed fit index is 0.95. The results of the fit indices indicated that the model's fit was satisfactory [82].

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

The results of the path coefficient analysis and the regression-based moderation analysis are used to test and prove hypotheses (see Table 4 and Figure 1). Hedonic value positively affected the brand love subdimensions of intimacy (H1a: $\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.000$), passion (H1b: $\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.004$), and commitment (H1c: $\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.002$). Further, utilitarian value positively affected the brand love subdimensions of intimacy (H2a: $\beta = 0.59$, $p < 0.000$), passion (H2b: $\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.000$), and commitment (H2c: $\beta = 0.66$, $p < 0.000$). Furthermore, eWOM moderates the relationship between hedonic value and the subdimensions of brand love, which are intimacy (H3a: $\beta = 0.73$, p 0.000), passion (H3b: $\beta = 0.86$, p 0.000), and commitment (H3c: $\beta = 0.75$, p 0.000). Additionally, eWOM moderates the relationship between utilitarian value and brand love subdimensions intimacy (H4a: $\beta = 0.75$, $p < 0.000$), passion (H4b: $\beta = 0.82$, $p < 0.000$), and commitment (H4c: $\beta = 0.73$, $p < 0.000$). Finally, brand love subdimensions intimacy and commitment positively affected customer loyalty (H1a: $\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.000$), (H1c: $\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.000$), respectively; however, passion did not affect customer loyalty (H5b: $\beta = -0.00$, $p < 0.000$; rejected).

Table 4. Direct effects and moderation analysis.

Hypotheses	Direct and Interaction Effects	Beta (ß)	*t*-Values	*p*-Value
H1a	Hedonic value à Intimacy	0.37	4.63	0.000 ***
H1b	Hedonic value à Passion	0.27	2.89	0.004 **
H1c	Hedonic value à Commitment	0.31	3.07	0.002 **
H2a	Utilitarian value à Intimacy	0.59	6.97	0.000 ***
H2b	Utilitarian value à Passion	0.72	7.30	0.000 ***
H2c	Utilitarian value à Commitment	0.66	6.24	0.000 ***
H3a	Hedonic value × EWOM à Intimacy	0.73	13.32	0.000 ***
H3b	Hedonic value × EWOM à Passion	0.86	15.64	0.000 ***
H3c	Hedonic value × EWOM à Commitment	0.75	11.92	0.000 ***
H4a	Utilitarian value × EWOM à Intimacy	0.75	12.06	0.000 ***
H4b	Utilitarian value × EWOM à Passion	0.82	13.58	0.000 ***
H4c	Utilitarian value × EWOM à Commitment	0.73	10.44	0.000 ***
H5a	Intimacy à Customer loyalty	0.72	4.63	0.000 ***
H5b	Passion à Customer loyalty	−0.00	−0.03	0.974
H5c	Commitment à Customer loyalty	0.26	2.67	0.008 **

Note: ** Absolute *t*-value > 2.58, $p < 0.01$; *** Absolute *t*-value > 3.29, $p < 0.001$.
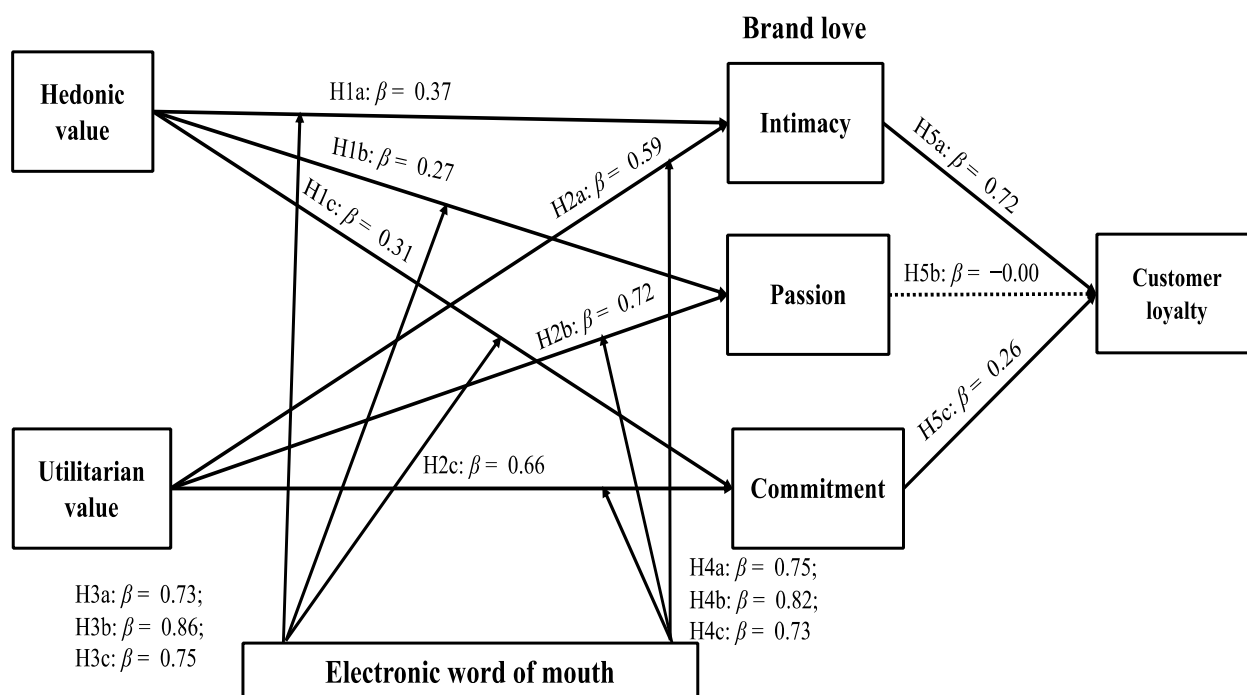
Figure 1. Testing the conceptual and structural model.

5. Discussion, Implications, and Limitations and Further Research

5.1. Discussion

We examined the effect of customer value on brand love and customer loyalty in fast-food restaurants, with eWOM acting as a moderator. First, we found that hedonic customer value significantly affected intimacy, passion, and commitment, all sub-dimensions of brand love (H1a, H1b, H1c; supported). However, customer hedonic value had a more significant impact on brand intimacy than passion and commitment. These findings imply that customers are likelier to create a strong emotional connection with the restaurant brand if they believe it provides a joyful and personalized experience [41]. Hence, customers who are made to feel valued and appreciated by the restaurant are more likely to become repeat customers [13]. Secondly, we found that utilitarian customer value impacted sub-dimensions of brand love (i.e., intimacy, passion, and commitment) more than hedonic value (H2a, H2b, H2c; supported). More explanation of these outcomes is that fast-food restaurants often offer inexpensive, quick, and convenient meals [1]. Hence, customers seek utilitarian customer value, which emphasizes efficiency and practicability. These results suggest that fast-food restaurant brands should continue giving utilitarian value to increase brand love.

Thirdly, eWOM moderated the connection between customer value dimensions (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian) and restaurant brand love sub-dimensions (i.e., intimacy, passion, and commitment) (H3a, H4b, H4c; supported, and H4a, H4b, H4c; supported). Nevertheless, the association between customer hedonic value and brand love rose in positive eWOM significantly. These results indicate that fast-food restaurant brands should maintain positive eWOM among customers. Hence, restaurants should aim to be creative and inventive with their services and engage customers through social media and other digital means [75]. In addition to developing an appealing and dynamic online presence, restaurants should use customer feedback to discover areas for improvement [56]. Finally, we revealed that brand love (i.e., intimacy and commitment) affected customer loyalty (H5a, H5c; supported). However, customer brand love (i.e., passion) did not influence customer loyalty (H5b; rejected). These results indicated that customers pay attention to the restaurant's brand, are emotionally connected, and want to repeat the purchase. These findings are consistent with Shen et al. [13], who discovered that customers' repeated willingness to

purchase restaurant goods and services reflects brand loyalty. Hence, the results demonstrate that the restaurant brand cares about its customers and is eager to communicate with them to understand and satisfy their needs, desires, and preferences [23].

5.2. Theoretical Implications

Several studies have been conducted on the topic of brand love in the hospitality sector, but most of them have concentrated on either brand love dimensions or brand love relationships [3,5,7,8]. However, little evidence has examined the influence of hedonic and utilitarian values on fast-food restaurant brand love sub-dimensions and customer loyalty. Hence, our research contributed to the hospitality industry's theoretical literature on multiple fronts. Initially, we expanded on the factors that influence the development of fast-food restaurant brand love. As we discovered, customer value (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian) influenced all sub-dimensions of brand love (i.e., intimacy, passion, and commitment). Hence, restaurants should deliver greater hedonic and utilitarian value to their customers. For instance, restaurants should provide unforgettable experiences (e.g., speedy service quality, happiness, entertainment, a friendly atmosphere, the adoption of cutting-edge technologies, the provision of customers with high-quality meals that exceed their expectations, and interaction with social media comments) [41–43,47].

Second, we confirmed that brand love could be an outcome when a restaurant gives its customers the necessary customer value, particularly in the digital economy. We discovered that the connection between customer value dimensions and brand love sub-dimensions was moderated by eWOM. Hence, fast-food restaurants still need to consider eWOM, and they should monitor and promptly reply to customer reviews [15]. This prompt response demonstrates to customers that the restaurant values their comments and is prepared to take steps to improve their dining experience. In addition, fast-food restaurants can benefit from developing online material such as blog posts, videos, and photographs that promote their offerings and customer experiences [60]. These online activities will aid in the development of a compelling online presence and customer emotional and cognitive engagement that will attract more customers. Finally, we extended the literature on customer loyalty by examining how brand love might be affected by offering higher customer value. We discovered that the sub-dimensions of brand love (i.e., intimacy and commitment) influenced customer loyalty. Hence, fast-food restaurants must consistently deliver value to customers in order to cultivate brand love and, subsequently, customer loyalty. In addition to providing outstanding customer value, restaurants should offer rewards and loyalty programs to attract repeat business [13]. Fast-food restaurants should also utilize social media to interact with customers and develop relationships with them [60].

5.3. Managerial Implications

Based on the outcomes of our study, we provide fast-food restaurant chains with numerous managerial implications for improving brand love and customer loyalty through customer value in the context of positive eWOM. First, we discovered that customer value dimensions (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian) significantly impacted brand love sub-dimensions (i.e., intimacy, passion, and commitment). Nevertheless, we discovered that fast-food restaurant customers are more concerned with utilitarian than hedonic values. Consequently, fast-food restaurants can provide customers with utilitarian value (e.g., convenience, reasonable price, quality, and reliability) [11]. These benefits can be achieved by providing quick and efficient service, offering various food options, good customer service, specials and discounts, and a comfortable dining environment) [1]. Moreover, fast-food restaurants can separate themselves from their competition by delivering personalized services, such as responding to customers' unique demands [15].

Second, we found that eWOM moderated the relationship between customer value and brand love. However, eWOM strengthened the hedonic value and brand love sub-dimensions relationship. Hence, fast-food restaurant brands can increase customers' hedonic value by establishing a joyful and exciting ambiance and increasing customers'

moods [15,41,42]. Restaurant managers can improve the hedonic value and brand love by connecting with customers emotionally. They should ensure the customer experience is delightful and memorable to create a friendly atmosphere and provide good customer service [47]. It is crucial to make the restaurant like a community by getting customers involved in conversations and reviews, online communities, customer loyalty programs, and special deals and discounts [57]. Fast-food restaurants can sustain favorable eWOM by promptly reacting to customer feedback, providing accurate information about their products and services, and maintaining high operational transparency [56]. Furthermore, fast-food restaurants may create an engaging and interactive online presence by developing valuable and engaging content, interacting with customers on social media, and fostering a positive online atmosphere [19]. Hence, by implementing these activities, fast-food restaurants may create a joyful and exciting atmosphere, improve customers' emotions, and develop loyalty and commitment.

5.4. Limitation and Further Research

Our study presents several opportunities for future research through its limitations. Firstly, we studied the effect of customer value on brand love in fast-food restaurants. Future research can synthesize most factors affecting brand love in restaurants in a systematic literature study because systematic reviews provide a comprehensive overview of the existing research on a particular topic [83]. This systematic review study can help identify literature trends and sources of bias or error. Hence, the systematic review study will explain all the factors that affect brand love, thus giving researchers the research gaps and explaining to restaurants all the factors that must be considered to increase brand love. Secondly, considering the tremendous technological developments, technological skills differ between generations [84], affecting the perceptions of customers' generations of brands. For example, generations with high technology skills can easily search and compare restaurant brands, and the search results influence their purchasing decisions.

Thirdly, with the high development of digital technology, the concept of brand love must also evolve into digital brand love. We define digital brand love as the emotional connection customers form with a brand through digital experiences. Digital brand love is created when customers have a positive experience with a brand's digital products and services, such as a pleasant website experience, helpful customer service, or an easy-to-use mobile app. Fourthly, we used the quantitative method in data collection. We suggest future studies use both quantitative and qualitative research methods together. By combining the two methods, researchers can better understand their research topic [85]. For example, quantitative research can provide insights into the numerical data related to a topic, while qualitative research can provide insights into the underlying reasons and motivations behind the data. Finally, previous studies have shown that customers' culture influences purchasing decisions [86]. For example, customers from different cultures may have different opinions on the quality of a product or service or may have different preferences for specific features or benefits. Therefore, the results of future studies will be more robust if they incorporate cross-national comparisons.

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