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Article

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The Impact of Brand Experience on eWOM: Brand Love and Brand Loyalty as Mediators in Consumer Electronics

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how brand experience affects eWOM by considering brand love and brand loyalty as mediators in consumer electronic sector.

Design/methodology/approach: A data survey was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, with 350 eligible respondents via Google Forms. The PLS-SEM approach was implemented to gauge the measurement and structural model.

Findings: The finding demonstrates that brand experience, brand love, and brand loyalty have a beneficial impact on eWOM. Furthermore, brand love and brand loyalty serve as mediators connecting brand experience and eWOM.

Research limitations/implications: This research might be used by scholars and practitioners to investigate how brand experience impacts eWOM in the consumer electronics sector, focusing on brand love and brand loyalty as mediators.

Originality/value: This investigation is one of the pioneers in deploying the SOR model to analyze how brand experience affects eWOM. It also contributes to existing research by highlighting the roles of brand love and brand loyalty as mediators in connecting brand experience with eWOM.

Keywords: Brand experience, Brand love, Brand loyalty, eWOM

I. Introduction

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a crucial information source for customers involving determining purchasing decisions (Yang, 2022). Utilizing eWOM in online brand communities, which has a substantial and diverse impact on customer behavior, is a strategy that businesses may utilize to assist their online marketing initiatives (Wong & Chung, 2023). eWOM

has transformed the customer buying process and is established, shared, and maintained (Liu et al., 2021). Moreover, the experience that a brand offers is of greater importance to many customers. Customers may obtain experiences from clients who post their experiences via the web or online platforms; this phenomenon is called e-WOM (Dewi & Kuswati, 2024). Similarly, it has been shown by researchers that the consumer experience takes place in certain circumstances, the most significant of which are when the customer is looking for things, purchasing products, or getting specific services (Jeon, 2023). Additionally, they have defined customer experience as the impressions that are produced by the consumer

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as a result of their interaction with the goods or services in question, especially customer experience in the consumer electronics industry (Brakus et al., 2009). This study focuses on the consumer electronics sector because according to the research carried out by Ali et al. (2020), the worldwide electronics for consumers sector is anticipated to continue its upward trend and create a turnover of almost US \$ 600 billion in the year 2023. This is despite the fact that the global economy is experiencing a downturn. As a result of the advent of a new third class of smart devices that are connected and make use of the capabilities of the Internet, the consumer electronics market is undergoing a gradual and consistent transformation. During the following decades, the third group is going to have the most possibility of expansion, particularly among metropolitan populations who are well-versed in technology. In addition, it was anticipated that the income generated by the consumer electronics industry in Vietnam would continue to rise between the years 2024 and 2028, reaching a total of US \$ 818.1 million, or a 10.32 percent growth. Following the fourth year in a row of straight increases, it is anticipated that will rise to US \$ 8.7 billion, which would represent a new high point in the year 2028 (Statista, 2024).

On the other hand, the effect of brand experience on eWOM has been shown by a few researchers such as Dewi & Kuswati (2024) and Almohaimmeed (2020). However, Dewi & Kuswati (2024) examined how brand experience impacts eWOM via the mediation of brand love. The research that was executed by Almohaimmeed (2020) investigated the effect that client satisfaction has on eWOM; and the impact of client satisfaction and eWOM. To date, through the current review, very few studies have examined the impact of brand experience on eWOM through the mediation of brand love and brand loyalty, especially in the consumer electronics market. Therefore, this study examines how brand experience affects eWOM by considering brand love and brand loyalty as mediators in the consumer electronics sector. Additionally, this research utilizes stimulus organism response (SOR) framework in explaining the brand experience to eWOM.

II. Literature Review

A. SOR Framework

The SOR model was created by scholars Mehrabian & Russell (1974). This framework of theory has been made in customer behavior and psychology studies to elucidate how external stimuli impact an individual's behavior and their reaction to those stimuli. The SOR framework suggests that external stimuli (S) influencing a consumer's internal state (O) will impact their behavioral reaction (R) during their experiences (Xue et al., 2020). This research uses the SOR paradigm to explain the crucial function of brand experience as a stimulus (S) via brand love and brand loyalty as organisms (O) and then influencing consumers' eWOM behavior (R).

B. Brand Experience

The notion of "brand experience" is derived from the idea of marketing that is experiential, which aims "to create holistic experiences that integrate individual experiences into an overall structure" (Schmitt, 1999). Brand experience represents a broad notion that includes all customer encounters related to a certain brand (Khan et al., 2016). Brand experience is a complex notion including emotions, ideas, perceptions, and actions triggered by brand-related stimuli like communication and packaging, reflecting consumer reactions and loyalty to the brand (Schmitt, 1999).

Brakus et al. (2009) offered four different forms of experiences related to brands, which were based on the research conducted by Schmitt (1999). These four categories include sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. Brand experience extends beyond the period immediately after purchase; it also includes every time there is engagement with the brand, whether it be direct or indirect. Their bond with it is also strengthened as a result.

C. eWOM, Brand Love and Brand Loyalty

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) defined "Electronic word of mouth as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet". Thus, eWOM in this study can be understood as customers' opinions, reviews, comments, or feedback about products/services on online commerce platforms by creating content. Media in the form of images, videos, or text (e.g. Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, etc) (Haryanto & Budiman, 2016).

eWOM is a rapidly evolving and ongoing exchange of actual and potential information on goods, services, brands, and enterprises available to many people and organizations via the Internet (Ismagilova et al., 2017). The most frequently used medium for sharing products and service reviews on the market is eWOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). One of the reasons for negative eWOM is that customers had an unexpected experience with the product, so they spread negative messages on social networks. Rathore et al. (2016) debated that properly monitoring and managing a company's eWOM communications can capture valuable information about products, services, and brands, such as customer feedback and preferences. A study by Tjahjaningsih et al. (2024) demonstrated experience with the brand positively impacts eWOM. Hence, we suggest:

H1: Brand experience positively influences eWOM

Brand love is crucial in brand management and the connection between customers and brands. Brand love is characterized by emotional connection and interpersonal bonds (Batra et al., 2012). Brand love also is the intense emotional connection a pleased customer has toward a certain brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love indicates a deep emotional attachment to a brand, driven by an enthusiastic view regarding that brand, and a collection of thoughts, feelings, and actions managed and adapted by consumers in mental models (Junaid et al., 2019). Customers' brand interactions evoke their inner

feelings and enhance their sense of affiliation with the brand (Trudeau & Shobeiri, 2016). Besides, brand experience's affective component predicts emotion and passion judgments (Ding & Tseng, 2015). Earlier research identified that the customer's experience with the brand offers a substantial bearing on the degree to which the consumer feels affection for the brand (Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2016; Dewi & Kuswati, 2024; Fernandes & Inverneiro, 2021). Moreover, eWOM can be tracked and supported as free internet advertising beyond the limits of space and time. After the experience, consumers may come to their conclusions. The communication of eWOM may be disseminated widely, anonymously, and promptly (Liu et al., 2021). According to Huang et al. (2022) college students' word-of-mouth is positively impacted by brand love when they purchase branded products based on brand communities. Likewise, Karjaluoto et al (2016) have additionally demonstrated that brand love positively influences eWOM and traditional word of mouth (WOM). Dewi & Kuswati (2024) disclosed that brand love has a crucial role as a mediating factor in influencing brand experience and favorable eWOM. Based on that, we propose:

H2: Brand experience has a favorable impact on brand love

H3: Brand love has a positive impact on eWOM

H4: Brand love mediates the link between brand experience and eWOM

Parris & Guzmán (2023) described brand loyalty as a strong dedication to consistently repurchase a favored item or service in future periods, regardless of external factors that might affect buying decisions. Moreover, an advantage over rivals and a sustained or expanding market share are outcomes of brand loyalty, ensuring loyal consumers maintain their product purchases (Chen & Lee, 2021; Mahothan et al., 2022; Utama, 2019). Brand loyalty is crucial for firms since it indicates a strong degree of customer loyalty towards the brand, leading to increased product sales and enhanced corporate success (Xin & Choi, 2020). Thus, each firm is striving to preserve and enhance client devotion to the brand (Suartina

et al., 2022). Establishing favorable brand experiences is essential for cultivating strong and enduring brand loyalty (Mascarenhas et al., 2006). Additionally, the research of Bapat & Thanigan (2016) and Khan et al. (2016) demonstrated that brand experience beneficially affects brand loyalty. Furthermore, brand loyalty may encourage other beneficial behaviors, such as eWOM (Anjasari & Wijaya, 2022). Former research in the literature has shown that brand loyalty and eWOM are positively correlated (Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2016). Similarly, brand loyalty plays a critical mediating role in shaping brand experience and eWOM (Anjasari & Wijaya, 2022). Based on that, we propose:

- H4:** Brand experience has a favorable impact on brand loyalty
- H5:** Brand loyalty has a positive impact on eWOM
- H6:** Brand loyalty mediates the link between brand experience and eWOM.

Figure 1 shows the hypotheses of the proposed model.

III. Methodology

A. Data Collection

The survey was created using Google Forms and sent to the target customers (i.e. customers who had purchased consumer electronics products) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, using social network groups including Zalo, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. The total number of replies received was 398; however, 48 responses were rejected because they did not include sufficient information. Of the 350 participants, 205 were males (58.6%), and 145 were females (41.4%). Most participants are 18 to 25 and 26 to 35 years old, with 31.4% and 35.7%, respectively. Because of the relatively young age of participants, their income levels are quite modest, including less than 400 USD (25.4%) and from 400 to less than 800 USD (29.1%). Approximately 30.9% of the remaining individuals have incomes from 800 USD to less than 1200 USD, and 14.6% of participants have incomes of more than 1200 USD. In terms of education, those who have completed college or university-level work make up the majority (72.6%). Table 1 exhibits the respondents' characteristics.

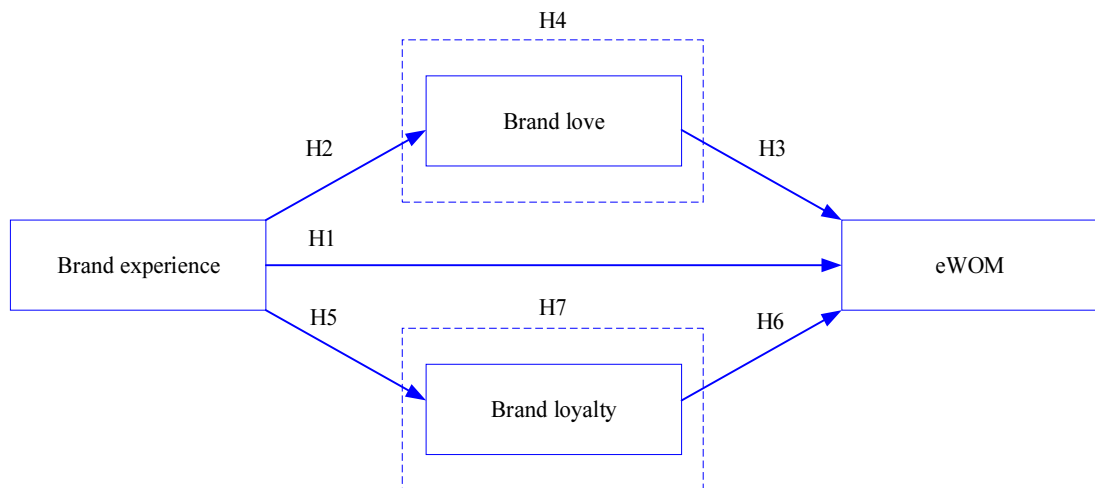


Figure 1. Research model

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics

No.	Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	205	58,6%
		Female	145	41,4%
2	Age	18-25	110	31,4%
		26-35	195	55,7%
		35-45	39	11,1%
		>45	6	1,7%
3	Average monthly income (USD)	< 400	89	25,4%
		400 - 799	102	29,1%
		- 1200	108	30,9%
		> 1200	51	14,6%
4	Education	Highschool	74	21,1%
		College	42	12,0%
		University	212	60,6%
		Others	22	6,3%

B. Measurement Scales

The measurements in this research were taken from earlier studies and revised to fit the context of brand experience in the consumer electronics industry. Specifically, the brand experience (10 items) was adjusted from Brakus et al. (2009), brand love (7 items) was taken from Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), brand loyalty (5 items) was taken from Bıçakcıoğlu et al. (2016) and Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), and eWOM (5 items) was altered from Karjaluoto et al. (2016) and (Ismail & Spinelli, 2012). The survey questions are designed as closed questions and adapted on a Likert scale with five levels, from level 1 completely disagree to level 5 agree entirely, for each option that best represents the participants' opinion.

C. Data Analysis

The study model was verified by the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The rationale behind this decision is outlined as follows: (1) PLS-SEM has been shown as appropriate for analyzing complicated tissue models (Hair, et al., 2016); (2) PLS-SEM is ideal for exploratory research to uncover the underlying correlations between variables. The process aids in verifying connections and formulating theories (Henseler

et al., 2009); and (3) PLS-SEM calculates data using a synthetic model with little bias (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

IV. Results

A. Measurement Model

According to Henseler et al. (2009), the evaluation of the measurement model was carried out with the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity indices.

Table 2 indicates that the reliability is appropriate, with an alpha value over 0.70 and consistent reliability (CR) above 0.70. The variables' reliability was verified. In addition, the outer loading values over 0.70 and average variance extracted (AVE) indexes of the items are both above 0.50, as shown in Table 2. It may be concluded that the convergent validity of the constructs has been met (Henseler et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the statistics in Table 3 indicate that each variable can be differentiated from the others with a strong discriminant validity, as seen by the larger AVE square root scores comparing the scores of the corresponding components. Therefore, the discriminant validity of the concepts in this research has been verified.

Table 2. Result of the measurements' accuracy analysis

Construct	Indicator	α	CR	Loading	AVE
Brand experience (BEX)	BEX1	0.922	0.935	0.830	0.590
	BEX2			0.816	
	BEX3			0.799	
	BEX4			0.809	
	BEX5			0.779	
	BEX6			0.714	
	BEX7			0.732	
	BEX8			0.761	
	BEX9			0.718	
	BEX10			0.711	
Brand love (BLV)	BLV1	0.890	0.914	0.777	0.603
	BLV2			0.729	
	BLV3			0.826	
	BLV4			0.772	
	BLV5			0.786	
	BLV6			0.789	
	BLV7			0.752	
Brand loyalty (BLY)	BLY1	0.855	0.896	0.804	0.634
	BLY2			0.776	
	BLY3			0.831	
	BLY4			0.803	
	BLY5			0.764	
eWOM	eWOM1	0.872	0.907	0.714	0.664
	eWOM2			0.733	
	eWOM3			0.850	
	eWOM4			0.858	
	eWOM5			0.902	

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker criterion

	BEX	BLV	BLY	eWOM
BEX	0.768			
BLV	0.642	0.776		
BLY	0.572	0.463	0.796	
eWOM	0.797	0.637	0.645	0.815

B. Structural Model

1. Multicollinearity Testing

Before testing the relationship, it is necessary to test the multicollinearity of the structural model based

on the regression of the dependent and intermediate variables (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The VIF findings are shown in Table 4, indicating the VIF values of all essential variables. The range from 1.521 to 2.032 is much lower than 5. Therefore, it can be confirmed that collinearity does not exist in this structural model.

2. R^2 (Explained Variance), f^2 (Effect Size) and Q^2 (Predictive Relevance)

According to Hair & Alamer (2022), the R^2 value is 0.75; 0.5 and 0.25 are considered strong, medium, and weak levels of fit, respectively. As indicated in Table 5, the model possesses a high degree of predictive ability. The adjusted R^2 value of the dependent variable eWOM was 0.703. Thus, the independent variables (brand experience-BEX, brand

love-BLV, and brand loyalty-BLY) affecting eWOM explained 70.3% of the variation of this variable. The adjusted R^2 value of the dependent variable (brand love-BLV) was 0.410. Thus, the independent variable (BEX) affecting BLV explained 41.0% of the variation in this variable. The adjusted R^2 value of the dependent variable (BLY) is 0.325. Thus, the independent variable (BEX) affecting BLY explained 32.5% of the variation in this variable.

Table 4. Collinearity statistics (VIF)

	BEX	BLV	BLY	eWOM
BEX				
BLV		1.000		
BLY			1.000	
eWOM				1.521

Table 5. R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2

Construct	R^2 adjusted	Q^2	Relationship	Path coefficients	f^2
BLV	0.410	0.242	BEX \rightarrow BLV	0.642	0.700
BLY	0.325	0.201	BEX \rightarrow BLY	0.572	0.485
eWOM	0.703	0.457	BEX \rightarrow eWOM	0.540	0.488
			BLV \rightarrow eWOM	0.172	0.058
			BLY \rightarrow eWOM	0.257	0.147

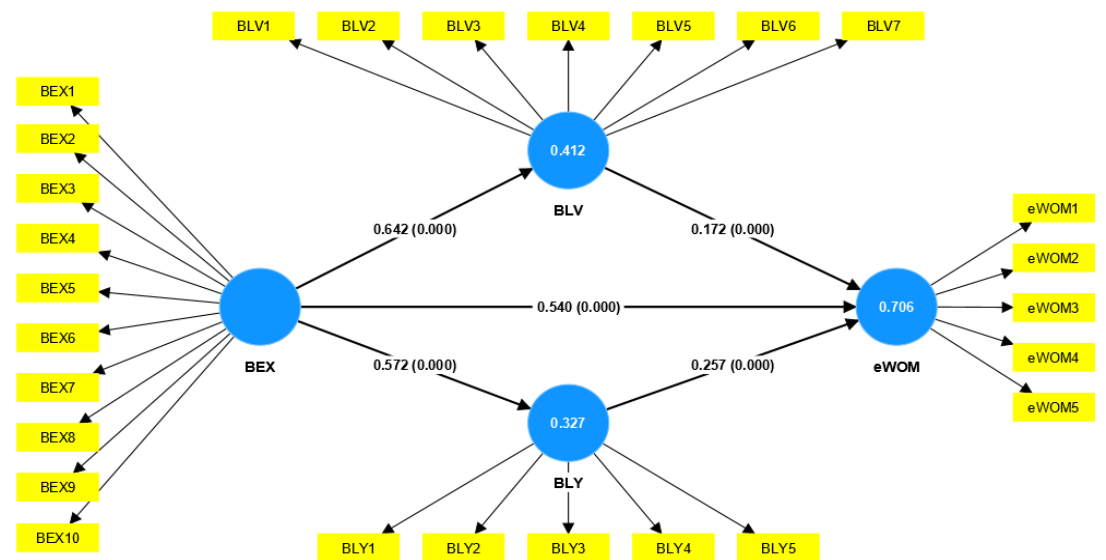


Figure 2. PLS result

Table 5 presents the Q^2 values of the constructs, which all exceeded zero, which indicated that the overall structural model of the research met overall quality. In other words, the research variables are all related to the model's prediction (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Table 5 illustrates the research variables' effect size (f^2) statistics. According to Cohen (1988), the f^2 effect size figure of 0.02 was considered weak, 0.15 was moderate, and 0.35 was large. Accordingly, the effect size (f^2) values indicated a strong effect in the relationship, including the effect of BEX on BLV, BLY, and eWOM. A moderate effect occurred in the link between BLY and eWOM, whereas the effect of BLV on eWOM is weak.

3. Hypotheses Testing

The research uses bootstrapping techniques and further evaluates the structural model with a replicate magnification of 5,000 samples ($n = 5,000$), with 350 initial samples. The PLS result for the model is illustrated in Figure 2.

As noticed in Figure 2 and Table 6, the hypotheses received a t-value that was more than 1.96, and these hypotheses were significant at a threshold of 5% significance. In light of this, the hypotheses included within the suggested research model were validated.

V. Discussions

This study has confirmed the seven hypotheses proposed in the model. According to the findings of the study, brand experience positively affected eWOM. The brand experience was an antecedent of eWOM. The relationship between brand experience and eWOM had a strong impact ($f^2 = 0.488$). The implication of this is that the more a customer has an experience with a certain brand in the consumer electronics industry, the more they eWOM that brand. This finding is corroborated by research (e.g. Tjahjaningsih et al., 2024). The findings showed that brand experience positively influenced brand love. The link between brand experience and brand love appeared extremely important with an effect size of 0.700 ($f^2 = 0.700$). Repeated exposure to a certain brand in the consumer electronics sector leads to increased customer love for that brand. This conclusion is supported by the study conducted by Bıçakcıoğlu et al. (2016). The analysis uncovered that brand love had a favorable influence on eWOM, yet the strength of this relationship was quite small ($f^2 = 0.058$). This conclusion is supported by Karjaluoto et al. (2016). Furthermore, the results highlighted that brand love as an essential mediating role between brand experience and good eWOM. This conclusion is corroborated by the research carried out by Dewi & Kuswati (2024).

Similarly, the results proved that brand experience favorably impacted brand loyalty. The association between this was very strong ($f^2 = 0.485$). This means that when consumers have a good experience with

Table 6. Hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	Linking	Coefficients	t-value	p-value	Results
H1	BEX → eWOM	0.540	11.661	0.000	Verified
H2	BEX → BLV	0.642	19.675	0.000	Verified
H3	BLV → eWOM	0.172	4.350	0.000	Verified
H4	BEX → BLV → eWOM	0.110	4.200	0.000	Verified
H5	BEX → BLY	0.572	14.494	0.000	Verified
H6	BLY → eWOM	0.257	7.242	0.000	Verified
H7	BEX → BLY → eWOM	0.147	6.446	0.000	Verified

a particular item or service brand in the home appliance sector then the consumer will increase their loyalty towards that brand. The findings of earlier studies (e.g. Khan et al., 2016; Tjahjaningsih et al., 2024) lend evidence to this conclusion. The results also proved that brand loyalty positively impacted eWOM. The effect size of this link was medium ($f^2 = 0.147$). This word means that when the client is loyal to the consumer electronics brand then the consumer will respond favorably by posting good reviews of the product through eWOM e.g. social networks. This finding was supported by Bıçakcıoğlu et al., (2016). The results also confirmed that brand loyalty plays a crucial role as an intermediary between brand experience and eWOM. Anjasari & Wijaya (2022) corroborated this discovery.

VI. Implications and Limitations

A. Theoretical Implications

The findings of this research propose the primary theoretical contributions. First, this research is one of the pioneers in using the SOR model to explain how brand experience influences eWOM via the intermediary effects of brand love and brand loyalty in consumer electronics. The constructs' measurements (brand experience, brand love, brand loyalty) have been proven to be reliable and valid. This research contributes to the field by offering views on how brand experience influences eWOM using the SOR framework. Second, there is a relatively small body of research that investigates the influence of brand experience on eWOM in consumer electronics by focusing on the role that brand love and brand loyalty play as mediators. As a result, this study contributes to the expansion and enrichment of the existing body of literature concerning the role that brand love and brand loyalty play as mediators in the relationship between brand experience and eWOM in consumer electronics.

B. Practical Implications

These findings of the results have contributed to practitioners and managers in consumer electronics. The results shed light on the relevance of the influence that brand experience, brand love, and brand loyalty have on eWOM in consumer electronics. Additionally, the study results provide practical tactics to enhance performance with this emerging commerce platform by enhancing customers' brand experience. The findings illustrate that brand experience has a favorable impact on eWOM, either directly or indirectly (via the intermediate effect of brand love and brand loyalty). Therefore, companies should focus on strategies to enhance the brand experience as well as reinforce the mediators of brand love and brand loyalty in the link between brand experience and eWOM. For example, they can apply artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) to enhance customer brand experience, they must constantly maintain products' appearance in front of live cameras and provide detailed details about the items to actively involve customers. Thus, companies can set up live-streaming areas in physical stores or design live-streaming studios that are similar to traditional retail shops to evoke consumers' realistic shopping experience as if they were offline shopping. In addition, managers should improve service quality at contact points such as changing the store's facilities, commitments to the customer, improving customer service quality, being responsive to consumers' concerns, being adept at problem-solving, and focusing on brand communities, etc well as have planned marketing to adapt the requirements for technology decades. In addition, they may ask questions to motivate consumers to comment on high-quality positive feedback and even realistically experience or test selling products right on social media to extend consumers' brand love and brand loyalty. On the contrary, they need to control and minimize negative comments to prevent consumers from being convinced by negative reviews that considerably reduce the probability of purchasing and avoid giving misleading and inconsistent information.

C. Limitations and Future Research

The research has some constraints. The study does not account for the influence of moderating factors. The author focused only on analyzing the factors of brand experience, brand love, and brand loyalty in connection with eWOM. Future studies might examine the influence of moderators like brand recognition and study other mechanisms in this association. Furthermore, this study examines the survey responses of consumers regarding various consumer electronics brands in a general sense, without delving into specific details about each brand of electronic consumer product. Further research should prioritize elucidating the survey to participants on specific brands of consumer electronics products.

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