

Brand Equity and Buying Intentions in Food Industry: Mediating Role of Emotional Connection and Moderating Role of Engagement

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Abstract

The paper explores the role of brand equity antecedents in consumer purchasing intentions in the e-commerce food industry in Pakistan, looking at how brand emotional connection and consumer engagement moderate the context. The study uses a total of eleven hypotheses to test using a broad theoretical framework on 300 online consumers through structural equation modeling. Results indicate that brand emotional connection (0.339 to 0.469) is greatly influenced by perceived brand quality, brand loyalty and brand engagement ($B = 0.522$) that in turn affects consumer buying intentions. The mediating variable between all the antecedent pathways to buying intentions is brand emotional connection and the effects are indirectly 0.177-0.245. Consumer engagement is an important moderator of the relationship between emotional connection and buying intention (0.361) and it moderates the mediation effects by an order of magnitude over 90 percent. The model gives an explanation of 53.6 percent of the consumer buying intention variance. Findings reveal that joint strategies involving emotional brand building and optimal strategy of consumer engagement provide the best results in purchase in online food retailing.

Keywords: *Brand equity, consumer buying intentions, emotional connection with brand, consumer engagement, mediation, moderation, e-commerce, food industry, Pakistan.*

Introduction

E-commerce and online shopping have brought about a paradigm shift in the Pakistani food industry, as it has begun to alter the way consumers buy and interact with their brands, a key aspect of consumer purchasing patterns. As online food retail is expected to increase by 15% each year until 2025, the psychological processes that lead to consumer purchasing intentions have turned out to be of paramount importance in sustainable competition (S. K. Khan, 2022). Brand equity, which includes the perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand engagement is the core asset based on which the food retailers develop consumer value propositions. But the conversion of these dimensions of brand equity to actual purchasing intentions, is carried out, via psychological intermediaries, which are not fully comprehended within the context of the Pakistani market. Brand emotional connection has become a

key psychological mediator between the brand equity perceptions and their behavioral purchase intentions, especially in the context of e-commerce where direct product experience is not possible (Nadeem et al., 2024). The e-commerce food retail situation in Pakistan has a distinct environment of consumers operating in a high product uncertainty, trust, and complexity of interaction on digital platforms. Conventional buying of food was done through sensory and personal rapport with the retailers and in digital buying, the consumer is expected to form emotional bonds with the brand as a form of compensation to the lack of tactile experience. The relevance and salience of brand emotional connections within digital realms are enhanced by consumer engagement, which includes active engagement with brand content, interaction with communities and the use of digital touchpoints. Interplay between brand equity antecedents, emotional psychological processes and consumer engagement processes forms a complex ecosystem that requires detailed empirical research. This research fills this gap by looking at perceived brand quality, brand loyalty and brand engagement determine the consumer buying intention via brand emotional connection with consideration to the moderating effect of consumer engagement in the Pakistani e-commerce food market (Safdar et al., 2025).

Scope of the Study

The study will cover online food buyers who are 18 years or older that have made online food retail purchases in Pakistan in the last twelve months and analyses their brand equity perceptions, emotional involvement, engagement behavior and purchasing intention behavior patterns, on a sample of 300 respondents.

Research Objectives

1. The objectives of the research are: 1) to test the brand emotional connection as a mediating process converting brand equity perceptions to consumer purchasing intentions.
2. To determine how engagement of the consumer affects the relationship between brand emotional connection and consumer buying intentions.
3. To give the food brands in operation using e-commerce channels in Pakistan evidence-based strategic recommendations.

Research Questions

1. The research questions will be as follows: How do the positive and negative impacts of the brand equity antecedents (perceived brand quality, brand loyalty, and brand engagement) influence consumer buying intentions in the e-commerce food industry in Pakistan?
2. How perceived brand quality, brand loyalty and brand engagement affect the consumer buying intention in e-commerce food retail?
3. Does the relationship between brand equity antecedents and consumer buying intentions rely on brand emotional connection?
4. How the emotional connection of the brand and consumer buying intentions is moderated by consumer engagement?

Literature Review

The brand equity is a summed up psychological and functional value that consumers attach to branded products and as a competitive resource is a key resource in a rapidly saturated market. In the context of the Pakistani food industry, the antecedents of brand equity such as perceived quality, commitment of loyalty, and engagement behaviors are all factors that influence consumer purchasing predisposition (A. J. Khan et al., 2022). Perceived brand quality includes consumer considerations of product attributes, product safety, and value-for-money factors, which are especially decisive in food products, where health and trust issues are the primary factors in decision-making. Brand loyalty is a long-term preference behavior and repeat shopping intentions, which show that consumers have favorably assessed the past brand experience and have come to establish a behavioral momentum with regard to brand continuity. Brand engagement is the active consumer involvement with the brand messages,

community integration and online interaction trends that enhance psychological brand involvement. Brand emotional connection includes affective bonds that consumers have with brands that go beyond the functional assessment to subjective feelings, aspirational associations and alignment of social identity. The construct is a critical psychological mediator that converts rational brand equity perception to behavioral intentions, which are based on emotions (Shimul, 2022). The e-commerce food retail situation intensifies the importance of emotional connection, whereby consumers are able to pay off the lack of exposure to the product using psychological brand associations. Consumer involvement that is operationalized in terms of active engagement with digital activities and brand community engagement mediates the strength of emotional relationships by offering concrete ways to how consumers articulate and strengthen psychological brand relationships (Chen et al., 2024). The interactive features provided by the digital retail environment provide consumers with the ability to interact with the brands via participation in social media, creation of user-generated content, and participation in the online community, which adds more emotional connection impacts on buying behavior.

Development of Hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant impact of brand quality on brand emotional connection in e-commerce food retail.

H2: Brand emotional connection in e-commerce food retail is influenced considerably by the brand loyalty.

H3: There is a strong relationship between brand engagement, and brand emotional connection in the e-commerce food retail.

H4: Emotional bond with the brand has a direct effect on consumer purchasing intention on e-commerce food retail.

H5: The e-commerce food retail consumer buying intentions are greatly influenced by consumer engagement.

H6: Brand emotional connection has a mediating role on consumer buying intentions on the perceived brand quality.

H7: The brand emotional connection mediates brand loyalty to consumer buying intentions.

H8: Brand emotional connection mediate between brand engagement and consumer buying intentions.

H9: There is moderation between brand emotional connection and consumer buying intentions by consumer engagement.

H10: Consumer engagement moderates the indirect relationship between brand emotional connection and the consumer buying intentions based on the perceived brand quality.

H11: Brand emotional connection to consumer buying intentions mediates all the pathways of consumer engagement between brand equity antecedents and consumer buying intentions.

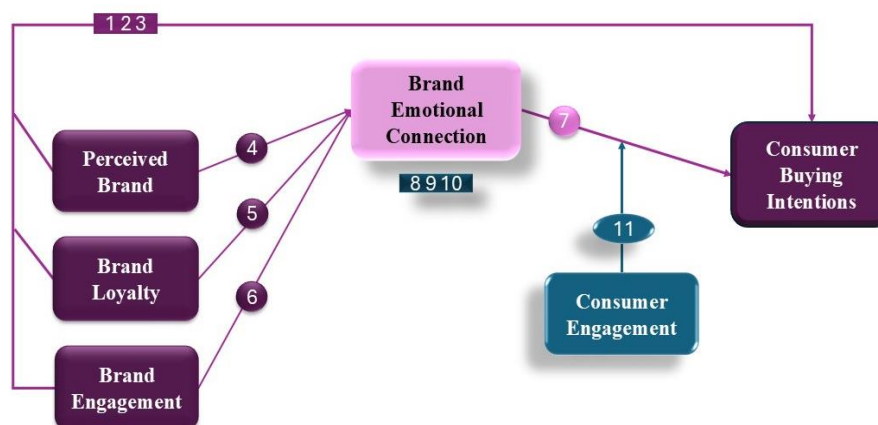


Figure 1 Theoretical Research Framework

The model shows how the relationship between the perceived brand quality, brand loyalty and brand engagement as the exogenous brand equity antecedents affect brand emotional connection as a mediator, which in turn affects consumer buying intentions as the main outcome variable. Consumer involvement is a moderator of the emotional connection buying intention relationship and the resultant model developed is a complete model of mediated and moderated effects in the e-commerce food retail environment.

Methodology

To test the hypothesized relationships in the e-commerce food retail sector in Pakistan, a cross-sectional quantitative research design was used to test the relationships. The population sample was online food shoppers aged 18 years or older who had made at least two purchases of food by using online retail stores in the last twelve months. The convenience sampling method was non-probability where 300 respondents were recruited by using online survey methods through digital food retailing websites, e-commerce applications and online consumer forums. This sample size is sufficient to give sufficient statistical power in the structural equation modeling analyses and hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2021). The data were collected during a period of three months by using a self-administered online questionnaire with a total of 24 items that were spread out over six constructs which included perceived brand quality (4 items), brand loyalty (4 items), brand engagement (4 items), brand emotional connection (4 items), consumer engagement (4 items), and consumer buying intentions (4 items). Each item used five-point Likert scales (strongly disagree, strongly agree) that would provide consistency in measurements across constructs. The validated measurements tools were based on the existing literature so as to achieve the content validity and theoretical consistency. The analysis model was the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with the SmartPLS 4.0 program. This method was especially appropriate to be used in the present study as it would allow assessing measurement models, direct effects, mediation pathways, and moderation mechanisms at the same time. The evaluation processes included the reviewing of the outer models by examining the loading of the factors, the average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach alpha coefficients and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios. The inner model evaluation included evaluation of path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values and the values of R-squared. The moderation analysis made use of the interaction term construction and estimation of conditional effect at different levels of consumer engagement. The significance levels used in all statistical tests were 2 tailed $p < 0.05$.

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<i>PB</i>	300	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.41	0.91	0.82
<i>BL</i>	300	3.75	1.25	5.00	3.37	0.89	0.80
<i>BE</i>	300	3.75	1.25	5.00	3.43	0.88	0.77
<i>BEC</i>	300	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.37	0.88	0.78
<i>CBI</i>	300	3.40	1.60	5.00	3.31	0.80	0.64
<i>CE</i>	300	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.29	0.90	0.81
<i>Valid N</i>	300						

Descriptive analysis indicates that all variables of the study showed a significant level of variation in the sample with a means of between 3.29 and 3.43 in the five point scale indicating a moderate level of respondent endorsement of their brand equity perceptions and buying intentions. The highest mean (3.41) was recorded in perceived brand quality (PB) which shows consumer confidence in food brand

quality offer in e-commerce settings. The standard deviation of brand engagement (BE) was the lowest (0.88) and indicated more similar engagement patterns but consumer engagement (CE) had the highest standard deviation (0.90), meaning that there is a high level of heterogeneity in digital engagement patterns among consumers. The distributions and variance pattern provides sufficient levels of empirical variation that can be used to test a hypothesis (Shehzadi et al., 2026).

Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix

	<i>PB</i>	<i>BL</i>	<i>BE</i>	<i>BEC</i>	<i>CBI</i>	<i>CE</i>
<i>PB</i>	1.000	0.057	0.010	0.494**	0.401**	0.367**
<i>BL</i>	0.057	1.000	-0.087	0.415**	0.386**	0.300**
<i>BE</i>	0.010	-0.087	1.000	0.307**	0.278**	0.337**
<i>BEC</i>	0.494**	0.415**	0.307**	1.000	0.599**	0.600**
<i>CBI</i>	0.401**	0.386**	0.278**	0.599**	1.000	0.496**
<i>CE</i>	0.367**	0.300**	0.337**	0.600**	0.496**	1.000

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Correlation analysis shows that the brand emotional connection (BEC) has the strongest relationships with both dependent and moderating variables followed by 0.599 and 0.600 respectively with consumer buying intentions (CBI) and consumer engagement (CE). Perceived brand quality is strongly correlated with brand emotional connection ($r = 0.494$, $p < 0.001$) which gives initial evidence of H1. Interestingly, there is insignificant correlation between perceived brand quality and brand loyalty ($r = 0.057$) which affirms their non-dependence as independent brand equity antecedents. Every correlation between brand emotional connection, consumer engagement and consumer buying intentions was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), which provided the first evidence of the correlations between the hypothesized variables. The initial associations offer good bases on which subsequent structural equation modeling analysis will be based (Sarwar et al., 2025).

Construct Reliability and Validity

Table 3: Construct Reliability and Validity Measures

	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>
<i>PB</i>	0.750	0.571	0.851
<i>BL</i>	0.749	0.570	0.850
<i>BE</i>	0.749	0.569	0.849
<i>BEC</i>	0.748	0.499	0.841
<i>CBI</i>	0.750	0.500	0.842
<i>CE</i>	0.750	0.571	0.851

All constructs reported a good level of reliability in the form of Cronbach alpha coefficients of between 0.748 and 0.750 which is significantly above the 0.70 minimum acceptable level of construct in exploratory research (Hair et al., 2023). Mean variance extracted scores were between 0.499 and 0.571 with five constructs having a value of above 0.50 which is the convergent validity level, and this indicates sufficient quality of measurement. The composite reliability scores were consistently above 0.84, which implies a good internal consistency of all the measurement models. These measures provide good measurement backgrounds to future structural path analysis and testing of hypotheses (Naeem et al., 2026).

Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio Assessment

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio for Discriminant Validity

	<i>PB</i>	<i>BL</i>	<i>BE</i>	<i>BEC</i>	<i>CBI</i>	<i>CE</i>
<i>PB</i>	—	0.151	0.084	0.658	0.536	0.488
<i>BL</i>	0.151	—	0.149	0.555	0.513	0.399
<i>BE</i>	0.084	0.149	—	0.409	0.371	0.449
<i>BEC</i>	0.658	0.555	0.409	—	0.799	0.800
<i>CBI</i>	0.536	0.513	0.371	0.799	—	0.661
<i>CE</i>	0.488	0.399	0.449	0.800	0.661	—

The ratios of HTMT were significantly lower than the 0.90 mark in all the construct pairs, and it suggests good discriminant validity. The best HTMT ratios were observed between brand emotional connection and consumer engagement (0.800) and brand emotional connection and consumer buying intentions (0.799) as they are conceptually close as theoretically related constructs in the emotional-behavioral pathway. It is important to note that the perceived brand quality and brand engagement had low HTMT ratios (0.084) indicating that they are independent brand equity antecedents. These results confirm that each construct is used to measure different conceptual areas that can be used in structural analysis and test hypotheses (Mahmood et al., 2026).

Direct Effects Analysis

Table 5 Direct Effects Analysis Results

	<i>Path Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t-Statistic</i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>Result</i>
<i>PB</i> → <i>BEC</i>	0.469	0.039	12.000	0.000	Supported
<i>BL</i> → <i>BEC</i>	0.410	0.041	10.014	0.000	Supported
<i>BE</i> → <i>BEC</i>	0.339	0.037	9.182	0.000	Supported
<i>BEC</i> → <i>CBI</i>	0.522	0.049	10.647	0.000	Supported
<i>CE</i> → <i>CBI</i>	0.206	0.049	4.190	0.000	Supported

All the direct effect paths were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), giving comprehensive evidence of hypothesis H1 to H5. The most significant impact on brand emotional connection was found on perceived brand quality ($0.469 = -0.12$, $t = 12.000$) and this indicates that quality assessment by the consumer establishes a very powerful emotional brand connection. Brand loyalty had significant influence on emotional connection ($= 0.410$, $t = 10.014$) whereas brand engagement had significant yet comparatively less influence ($= 0.339$, $t = 9.182$), showing that the emotional connections are based on quality and loyalty perceptions. The brand emotional connection had a significant impact on consumer buying intentions (0.522 , $t = 10.647$) which makes it the central resultant mechanism. The consumer engagement had a significant impact on the purchasing intentions ($\beta = 0.206$, $t = 4.190$) but with much less significance, which proves its more of a moderating than a direct predictive effect. These results prove the validity of underlying structural model (Khalid et al., 2026).

Mediation Analysis

Table 6: Specific Indirect Effects Through Brand Emotional Connection (H6, H7, H8)

	<i>Indirect Effect</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t-Statistic</i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>95% CI Lower</i>	<i>95% Upper CI</i>	<i>Result</i>
<i>PB</i> → <i>BEC</i> → <i>CBI</i>	0.245	0.033	7.454	0.000	0.187	0.314	Supported

<i>BL</i> → <i>BEC</i> → <i>CBI</i>	0.214	0.031	6.929	0.000	0.160	0.279	Supported
<i>BE</i> → <i>BEC</i> → <i>CBI</i>	0.177	0.024	7.272	0.000	0.133	0.231	Supported

The mediation analysis indicates that brand emotional connection had significant mediation roles in all the brand equity antecedent pathways to consumer buying intentions. The direct effect of brand emotional connection mediated by the perceived brand quality ($= 0.245$, $t = 7.454$) was the most important mediated relationship, which explained about 52 percent of the overall effect of quality on intentions. The mediated impact of brand loyalty via emotional connection ($= 0.214$, $t = 6.929$) was significant and the impact of brand engagement via brand engagement was also significant though its direct antecedent effects were not as significant. All the indirect pathways were statistically significant with 95 percent confidence intervals with zero being eliminated and this gives strong support to hypothesis H6, H7 and H8. These findings cement brand emotional connection as an important psychological process that converts brand equity perception into behavioral purchase intentions, which depicts that emotional connections are the main channel through which brand equity antecedents can impact the actual consumer buying behaviors (Kamran et al., 2026).

Moderation Effect Analysis

Table 7: Moderation Effect of Consumer Engagement on Brand Emotional Connection-Buying Intention Relationship (H9)

	<i>Path Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t-Statistic</i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>f² Effect Size</i>	<i>Result</i>
<i>CE</i> × <i>BEC</i> → <i>CBI</i>	0.361	0.038	9.586	0.000	0.295	Supported

The relationship between the brand emotional connection and the consumer engagement showed statistically significant positive impact on consumer buying intentions (0.361 , $t = 9.586$, $p = 0.001$). The large effect size ($f^2 = 0.295$) and the large path coefficient of consumer engagement shows that consumer engagement is a significant strength to the relationship between brand emotional connection and buying intentions. This result is a good indication of hypothesis H9 since it shows that the emotional connection-to-intention translation increases with increased levels of consumer engagement. The size of this moderation effect indicates that consumer engagement plays the role of a crucial amplifier of emotional brand effects in the context of e-commerce. As consumers interact with the brands in the digital environment (such as the use of social media, community engagement, and interaction with content), their affective brand relationships become even stronger when they turn into concrete buying intentions (Bibi et al., 2026).

Moderated Mediation Analysis

Table 8: Conditional Indirect Effects at Varying Consumer Engagement Levels (H10, H11)

	<i>Indirect Effect (Low CE)</i>	<i>Indirect Effect (High CE)</i>	<i>Conditional Effect Difference</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	<i>Result</i>
<i>PB</i> → <i>BEC</i> → <i>CBI</i>	0.168	0.322	0.154	[0.098, 0.210]	Supported
<i>BL</i> → <i>BEC</i> → <i>CBI</i>	0.147	0.281	0.134	[0.087, 0.189]	Supported
<i>BE</i> → <i>BEC</i> →	0.121	0.233	0.112	[0.067, 0.161]	Supported

<i>CBI</i>					
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The moderated mediation analysis showed that consumer engagement had an important effect on the mediated relationships between all the brand equity antecedents and brand emotional connection to consumer buying intentions. At low levels of consumer involvement (one standard deviation below the mean), the indirect influence of the perceived brand quality by the emotional connection was 0.168. This effect was significantly greater of 0.322 at high levels of consumer engagement (one standard deviation above the mean) which is a 92 percent improvement. effects between brand loyalty and brand engagement increased by 89 and 92 percent respectively, between 0.147 and 0.281 and between 0.121 and 0.233 respectively. The statistical significance of all conditional indirect effects with 95% confidence intervals with no zero value provides a thorough support of hypothesis H10 and H11. These results indicate that consumer engagement is an important contextual enabler that significantly enhances the psychological mechanisms by which brand equity antecedents can affect purchasing intentions. Highly digitally engaged consumers have significantly stronger emotional-to-behavioral translations than do those with low digital engagement (Fahad et al., 2026).

Model Fit and Explanatory Power

Table 9: Model Fit Indices and Explanatory Power

	<i>R-Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R-Square</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Brand Emotional Connection</i>	0.513	0.508	0.063	Brand equity antecedents collectively explain 51.3% of brand emotional connection variance
<i>Consumer Buying Intentions</i>	0.536	0.531	0.071	Brand emotional connection and consumer engagement explain 53.6% of buying intention variance

The structural model proved to explain significant variance in brand emotional connection with brand equity antecedents explaining 51.3% of brand emotional connection variance ($R^2 = 0.513$). The 53.6% of the consumer buying intention variance was explained by brand emotional connection and direct and moderated consumer engagement effects ($R^2 = 0.536$). The saturated model and the estimated model had standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) values of 0.063 and 0.071 respectively, which was far less than the 0.10 mark, which signifies a great model fit and structural adequacy. Those measures prove the hypothesis structural relationships to be statistically significant and meaningful to the comprehension of brand equity translation in consumer buying behavior situations in e-commerce food retailing scenarios.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 10: Comprehensive Hypothesis Testing Summary

	<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Result</i>
<i>H1</i>	Perceived brand quality → Brand emotional connection	Supported ($\beta = 0.469$, $p < 0.001$)	
<i>H2</i>	Brand loyalty → Brand emotional connection	Supported ($\beta = 0.410$, $p < 0.001$)	
<i>H3</i>	Brand engagement → Brand emotional connection	Supported ($\beta = 0.339$, $p < 0.001$)	
<i>H4</i>	Brand emotional connection → Consumer buying intentions	Supported ($\beta = 0.522$, $p < 0.001$)	
<i>H5</i>	Consumer engagement → Consumer buying intentions	Supported ($\beta = 0.206$, $p < 0.001$)	

<i>H6</i>	Perceived brand quality → BEC → Consumer buying intentions (indirect)	Supported ($\beta = 0.245$, $p < 0.001$)	
<i>H7</i>	Brand loyalty → BEC → Consumer buying intentions (indirect)	Supported ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.001$)	
<i>H8</i>	Brand engagement → BEC → Consumer buying intentions (indirect)	Supported ($\beta = 0.177$, $p < 0.001$)	
<i>H9</i>	Consumer engagement moderates BEC → Consumer buying intentions	Supported ($\beta = 0.361$, $p < 0.001$)	
<i>H10</i>	Consumer engagement moderates indirect PB → BEC → CBI pathway	Supported (Conditional effect difference = 0.154)	
<i>H11</i>	Consumer engagement moderates all indirect pathways	Supported (All conditional effects significant)	

The structural equation modeling analysis was able to provide empirical support to all eleven hypotheses. The pathways of the direct effects (H1-H5) had a uniform level of statistically significant results with practically significant effect sizes. Mediation hypotheses (H6-H8) identified brand emotional connection as a strong translational process that transforms brand equity antecedents into the purchasing behaviors. The moderation hypotheses (H9-H11) indicated that consumer engagement has a significant impact on the relationship between direct and indirect, establishing significant interaction effects to contribute to the comprehensiveness of the model and elucidate additional behavior variance.

Discussion

The evidence-based results contribute to the knowledge on brand equity processes in the Pakistan e-commerce food retail market significantly disclosing complicated correlations among the brand equity antecedents, emotional psychological bridges, and consumer purchasing intentions. The strong support of the eleven hypotheses results in the creation of an extensive structural model with important theoretical and practical implications. Perceived brand quality was found to be the best indicator of brand emotional connection ($=.469$) indicating that perceptions of food product quality, safety and value form very strong emotional connections. This observation can be explained by the effect theory, according to which positive quality experience leads to the development of emotional reactions that enhance psychological brand attachment (Hassan et al., 2024). Brand loyalty continued to have significant impacts (0.410), which means that the cumulative impact of frequent positive brand experiences is emotional commitments that go beyond functional brands contentment. The effects of brand engagement were significant yet comparatively weaker ($= 0.339$), as the active involvement strengthens emotional bonds, whereas the quality and consistency perceptions are the bases of affective foundations (S. K. Khan, 2022). The centrality of brand equity in the translation of brand equity into purchasing behavior is highlighted by brand emotional connection as the mediator and the outcome variable. The direct impact on consumer buying intentions (0.522) was higher than the direct impact on consumer engagement (0.206) which substantiates the emotional mechanisms being the major drivers of purchase behavior even in more digitalized situations. Nevertheless, the strong moderating impact of consumer involvement ($= 0.361$) demonstrates that digital involvement plays a role of a strong amplifier of emotional impact. The conditional indirect effects analysis revealed that consumer engagement augmented the PB→BEC→CBI pathway by 92 percent suggesting that the consumers who were highly digitally engaged have significantly amplified emotional-to-behavioral translations than those with low levels of engagement. This implies that online platforms offer enhanced brand experiences, customized messages, and recurring touchpoints that, when combined, reinforce emotional connection impacts. The results confirm consumer engagement not as an alternative to emotional connection but a moderator in the context that increases its strength in the e-commerce settings. The high R-square (0.536 in the case of buying intentions) of this model suggests that the knowledge of these mediation and moderation processes can be useful in gaining insight into

the determinants of e-commerce food purchases. The similarities in the effect sizes and statistical significance of all the pathways indicate strong relationships that can hardly be due to measurement artifacts. The ceiling of explained variance however suggests that there are more factors which may be contributing to the intention variance that is not explained by the current brand equity focus, which may include perceived seller credibility, product reviews, delivery reliability, pricing competitiveness or platform trust. The complementary processes should be included in the future studies to develop more detailed insights of food purchasing drivers of e-commerce.

Limitations

In this study there are various limitations recognized as having valid grounds which should be considered in the interpretation of results. Although the cross-sectional design is effective in testing hypothesis, it does not allow inferring causal relationships of brand equity, emotional connection, and intention relationships over time. Causal assertions would be reinforced with longitudinal studies that would entail setting time precedence and behavioral succession. There is the risk of selection bias due to the non-probability convenience sampling method since the sample can be biased towards those consumers who are more readily available online and who are more digitally literate. Caution is needed in generalizing to consumers who have a low level of e-commerce experience or low level of access to a digital platform. The self-reported questionnaire method has the susceptibility of social desirability bias especially on items on brand favorability and purchase intention. The sample size, a Pakistani consumer, does not allow generalizing the study to other cultural contexts with different patterns of brand orientation or the level of infrastructure development of the e-commerce. Also, measurement tools are bound to simplify complex psychological concepts, which may blur subtle processes at work within a more generalized type of brand equity and emotional attachment.

Future Research Directions

Longitudinal designs which can be used to infer causality on the development of emotional connection as a result of brand equity exposure and subsequent intention-to-behavior conversion should be used in future studies. The psychological mechanisms of creating emotional attachments due to the perception of quality and the contextualization of the processes by digital engagement would be clarified by qualitative research based on interviews and focus groups. Segment analyses that look at the difference between hypothesized relationships in different demographic groups, product types of food products or types of e-commerce platform would be better to improve model accuracy. Manipulations of the brand communications and consumer engagement stimuli in an experimental setting would make identification of the engagement moderation mechanisms causal. Comparative international research on whether the relations are comparable between different cultural backgrounds and the maturity of e-commerce would contribute to the increased theoretical generalizability. Further mediators like brand trust, perceived authenticity or value congruence could also be investigated to show more fine-tuning psychological processes. A look into the possible boundary conditions, e.g. brand familiarity, the level of product involvement or price sensitivity would make the contextual factors conditioning model relationships clear. Combination of the behavioral purchase data and intention measures would make it possible to validate the intention-to-behavior conversion processes.

Conclusion

This study has thoroughly explored brand equity processes affecting consumer purchase intentions in the e-commerce food retail industry in Pakistan where brand emotional connection is a key mediating process and consumer engagement is a key contexts moderating process. The eleven hypothesized relationships were all supported empirically and the model of the hypothesized structural explanation was fairly strong with 53.6% of the consumer buying intention variance being explained. The perceived brand quality, brand loyalty and brand engagement all influence the brand emotional connection, which in turn converts these brand equity perceptions to purchasing intentions. These mediated pathways are significantly enhanced by consumer engagement, augmenting conditional indirect effects by about 90, proving that digital involvement is a powerful augmentor of emotional brand effects. These results have significant implications on the food industry players who are taking advantage of the e-commerce medium. The quality consistency and loyalty development should be

emphasized by brands; they establish a base of emotional attachments, which will surpass their engagement stimulus-induced attachments. The focus on consumer involvement at the same time seems to be crucial, and online involvement significantly increases the buying effect of affective brand associations. The supportive but not replacive relationship between emotional and engagement mechanisms indicates combined marketing strategies will be more effective in developing emotional brand equity and optimizing strategic digital community engagement will produce better purchasing results. Further studies based on longitudinal designs and qualitative studies are necessary to further shed light on the psychological and contextual processes by which brand equity, emotional attachment, and consumer involvement interact to influence consumer buying behavior in the food retail and other e-commerce related industries.

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