

THE RELATION BETWEEN BRAND STRENGTH AND WORD OF MOUTH IN THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF SATISFACTION

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Abstract: The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the impact of Brand strength on word of mouth mediated by satisfaction within turkey,

with this country having being a very big sectors for marketing and branding that is improving over time, with the increasing attraction of foreigner in the recent years, making the branding sector an overall interesting field to know how does interactions with customers , thoughts and views effect the behavior towards the brand when talking about them in public, within the framework of this study quantitative research methods were applied on the data collected from our responders using self-administered, Likert type online survey. The data were analyzed using statistical software to do Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equational modeling (SEM). The findings of the study indicated that Brand strength does demonstrate an impact on word of mouth (WOM), when mediated with satisfaction. Additionally, these results can raise up the awareness of meeting the customers' expectations and needs rather than only focusing on building a strong brand externally, and the importance of researching strategies that takes customers point of view in considerations, resulting in a strategies that can be used as an indirect powerful marketing tool.

Keywords: Brand Strength, Higher Education, Satisfaction, WOM.

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of relations between brands and customers is an area that all the organization search in for gaining customers support and establish a better position in market. Main part of this idea, is to gain equity which is an attempt to reach for a definition that explain relationship between customers and their corresponding favorite brands, resulting in value generation and profit for the brand owners , meaning a brand could be thought of a long term investment for the future good of any firm (Wood Lisa, 2000).The seeking of advantages and privilege to generate value is a major indicator of seeking for success , having a well-known fully defined brand is a great effector on customers buying behavior (Fleming, & Godek, 2004). According to the American Marketing Association branding is the act of giving anything a name or an identity, whatever is it, a place, a thing or an organization. And hence introducing word of mouth, now word of mouth is a very effective way to transfer information about a brand, a thing or a person. Especially bad word of mouth due to the nature of human being (Kensinger, 2007), word of mouth (WOM) could be altered and changed in a way that manipulate the behavioral interactions upon customer , by induction of a the organization Fleming, & Godek, 2004, a non-satisfied customer might not spread but bad Word of mouth(WOM) about the brand , satisfaction is immediate response of the customers towards the offerings given by the brand as a positive response(Giese and Cote, 2000), Efficiently this changes from an industry to another by shape of response IE how customer respond, but generally a positive response to the offerings given, it was capsulized based on pervious researches, that it is in fact the feeling of happiness the results after consumption of the service , when the quality meets or even accedes the expectations of the customer (Carlson and

O’Cass, 2010), leading to construct the behavioral attributes and hypnotizing that satisfaction is a main mediator of brand strength to induce word of mouth (WOM)

II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND MODEL

A prior research mentioned how word of mouth (WOM) important upon relationship marketing where word of mouth holds a big effect when enabled correctly (Brown *et al.*, 2005), a customer should familiar with the brand, assuming a good picture of the brand and conveyed that its remarkable upon others, i.e. convinced to use the brand on their free will, arguably a customer is willing to engage in positive word of mouth when fully acknowledged with their brand, and being a recurrent effective customer, leading to construct that brand strength effect the induction of positive word of mouth (WOM) on respective customers (Longwell, 1994; Wymer, 2013) explaining the use of the brand strength as a strategic leverage to increase the performance of their equity, and could be linked to broad branding landscape (Louro and Cunha, 2001), it was found that heard based brand selection require lower effort, and gives the customer the feeling of the right choice and thus comes the part where word of mouth (WOM) helps, asking other people on social media or face to face cause an overlap between the customer and the brand, the better known brand and stronger brand, the more likely the customer will engage on word of mouth (WOM) and the more satisfied customer, the better positive word of mouth engagement (Brown *et al.*, 2005), these results indicates how important is driving positive word of mouth (WOM) (Wangenheim and Bayón, 2007) and more than that, is the maintaining of word of mouth (WOM) as positive, where the more satisfied customer shows higher levels of commitment (Brown *et al.*, 2005), also when presented with the same type of services from a rival brand, results in mentioning the brand and comparing to the levels of satisfactions gotten before (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987) adding extra level of complexity to the effect of brand strength on word of mouth by introducing satisfaction. Reserchers agreed that satisfaction is a powerful mediator controlling the relationship of brand strength and word of mouth (WOM), as a satisfied customer does not hesitate of giving tribute to the brand that satisfied them, making them feel a happiness doing the “correct” thing (Wymer and Casidy, 2015).

The background given above has led to conceptualize the flowing hypothesis:

H1: Brand strength has a positive influence on positive word of mouth (WOM) when mediated by satisfaction.

III. METHODOLOGY

a. Sample Selection and Data Collection

As this numerical study is focused on geographical area, a quantitative method of questionnaire and statistical process was implemented on the collected data for purpose of analyzing the data, the data were collected randomly using self-administered, Likert type online survey

After that, the qualitative methods were used as the research in of books, scientific articles and other scientific resources, to verify the methods and to be able to get a wider look and unveil brighter results of the numerical data collected. A total of 385 usable responses were collected that are (53.4% male, 46.6% female) that data recoded that the majority of the responders (67.2%) are between 19-25 of age and most of the respondent (74.2%) had a bachelor’s degree or above.

b. Measures

The focused constrains under this research were brand strength, word of mouth (WOM) and loyalty were measured using a five-point Likert scale. **Table1**

Table 1: Questioner design

Variable	Question	Source
Brand strength	1. I am knowledgeable about the activities of my brand.	Wymer, Scholz, & Helmig (2012)
	2. I am able to describe my brand to others.	
	3. I have a good understanding of what my university has done in the past.	
	4. No brand is better than my university at doing what it does.	
	5. My brand really stands apart as being exceptional.	
	6. My brand stands out in comparison to others.	

	7. I have positive thoughts when I think of my university. 8. I like my brand. 9. I have a positive impression about my brand.	
Satisfaction	1. I am quite pleased with the quality of service I have received. 2. I am very satisfied with my experience at my brand. 3. I think I did the right thing when I decided to use this brand.	Athiyaman (1997)
word-of-mouth (WOM)	1. I offer favorable comments and information about my brand to others without being asked. 2. When people outside of my brand ask about the university, I make favorable comments. 3. When other customers of the brand talk about it, I make favorable Comments	Helgesen and Nettet (2007)

As shown in table all variables are measured using multi item measures, satisfaction was adapted from

(Athiyaman 1997) which included 3 positively worded and 3 negatively worded questions for reverse scoring proposes which it was decided not to include, Loyalty and(WOM) are unidimensional constructs that were being measured reflectively, while brand strength is a three directional construct and thus used many questions to measure.

c. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA was deployed using SPSS 26 to assess the fitting of the model done, EFA includes only dependent and independent variable , and thus satisfaction was not included (Hair, 2015, p. 411), **Table 2** results with very high clean and loading numbers (no loadings below 0.3),(Gaskin, J. and Lim, J., 2016)

Then (KMO) Keiser-Meyer-Olkin Sampling Adequacy value was tested which ensure that the data is adequate to do factor analyses and have a minimum threshold of 0.5 (Durmuş, et al., 2011), Bartlett's Test of Sphericity also showed a significant p-value which is adequate with general with social sciences requirements. **Table 3**

Table 2: EFA loadings

	Brand strength	WOM
I am knowledgeable about the activities of my brand.	.572	
I am able to describe my brand to others.	.663	
I have a good understanding of what my university has done in the past.	.691	
No brand is better than my university at doing what it does.	.815	
My brand really stands apart as being exceptional.	.754	
My brand stands out in comparison to others.	.918	
I have positive thoughts when I think of my university.	.893	
I like my brand.	.778	
I have a positive impression about my brand.	.820	
offer favorable comments and information about my brand to others without being asked.		.959
When people outside of my brand ask about the university, I make favorable comments.		.637
When other customers of the brand talk about it, I make favorable Comments		.674

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.941
Approx. Chi-Square	3652.797
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df
	66
	Sig.
	.000

d. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was employed using SPSS AMOS 26 Giving the opportunity for the regression of the paths to be evaluated, which resulted that the model showed a very significant fit with model fit indices that satisfied the following:

- CFI ≥ 0.95 (Hu and Bentler, 1999).
- GFI values close to 1.00 is a good fit (Byrne, 2010).
- AGFI values close to 1.00 is a good fit (Byrne, 2010).
- RMSEA between 0.06 to 0.08 (Schreiber et al., 2006).
- SRMR ≤ 0.05 (Byrne, 2010)

Our data showed a CFI =0.95 GFI=0.88 AGFI=0.84 RMSEA=0.060 SRMR=0.03 indicating an adequate fit.

e. Hypotheses Testing (SEM)

The structural equation model was done using SPSS AMOS 26, resulted with Squared Multiple Correlations indicating the percentage of variance could reflected by the predictions of factors and the higher the value the better (Byrne, 2010).

Table 4 indicates that variance are explained relatively well

Table 4: Squared Multiple Correlations

Predictor Variable	Estimate
WOM3	.738
WOM2	.713
WOM1	.528
S3	.796
S2	.760
S1	.687
BS9	.737
BS8	.771
BS7	.769
BS6	.678
BS5	.576
BS4	.550
BS3	.512
BS2	.557
BS1	.380

finally using SPSS AMOS (Version 26) plugin by (Gaskin, J., James, M., & Lim, J. 2020) it was able to test indirect hypothesis with a p value < 0.010 it could be supported that brand strength when mediated by satisfaction showed a significant positive effect on word of mouth.

Table 5: indirect (mediation) effect analysis result

Indirect Path	Unstandardized Estimate	Lower	Upper	P-Value	Standardized Estimate
Brandstringht --> satisfaction --> wordofmouth	0.439	0.226	0.639	0.003	0.379**

** p < 0.010

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This paper was aimed to discover the underlying effect of satisfaction, as a part of the research on brand strength effect on word of mouth (WOM), a good Brand strength means the brand is well defined, known, and perceived particular by customer. It was found by the research that Though no matter how strong the brand effect towards word of mouth (WOM), satisfaction plays a major role in this relationship by mediating the relationship and increasing the effect of the brand on its corresponding customer quite a lot. Matter of a fact it wasn't surprising that satisfaction have a big role in word of mouth where the more satisfied the customer with the service from a firm that they know and prefer, the better engagement and willing to speak about it , and more frequently the customer will engage in word of mouth spread (WOM) and vice versa.

Limitations of the Research.

This paper is made for the Turkish market and have totally collected data from the Turkish public, despite asking the questionnaire takers to give honest opinion and being explained the goal of the study and the anonymous nature of the research surveys were carried with self-monitored environment, where most of the responses were recorded online due to COVID-19 outbreak, the data was collected randomly and within the access of the reserchers.

This study focused on brand strength as a whole without studying its subdimensions, although it was measured by its subdimensions, it was used and focused to as one dimension and the data was analyzed based on that , would advice other reserchers to explore more in brand strength daimonions, and the effects of satisfaction on the dimensions separated.

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