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Influential Determinants of Word-of-Mouth in Shaping Referral Intentions: An Evidence from Bahawalpur District

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed impact of influential factors (perceived value, service quality, consumer trust and product quality) on electronic word-of-mouth and referral intention in the background of fast-food industry. The research investigated the impact of electronic word-of-mouth as mediator between influential factors and referral intention. Data was retrieved from 400 students (Fast Food Consumers) from Punjab College, BEST College and NCBA&E in Bahawalpur through convenience sampling. Hypothesis is tested by analyzing regression. The outcomes demonstrated that perceived value, service quality, consumer trust and product quality have positive and substantial influence on electronic word-ofmouth and referral intention. The finding of the study revealed the impact of electronic word-of-mouth as mediator between influential factors and referral intention. This research contributed in literature & practically by examining the product quality as an influential factor of electronic wordof-mouth.

Introduction

Particularly, electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) is channelized as public sharing among people who never met before and without social connections. It is due to magnitude, authenticity and pace of online sharing, electronic WoM has become center of attention of research in present era (Thadani 2012; Cheung & King et al., 2014; Lin & Lin, 2018; Yuan et. al., 2021; Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Manandhar et al., 2023; Zain & Hasan, 2024; Sepac et al., 2024). WoM plays great role in the formation of consumer decision (Berger, 2014). It is recognized as one of the earliest channels for conferring bits of knowledge on products and services (Goyette et al., 2010; Wetzer et al., 2007; Lin & Lin, 2018; Zoghlami et al., 2018).

Prior research has showed that word-of-mouth (WoM) has a prodigious influence on formation of consumer decision for both goods and services (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Arndt, 1967; Sheth, 1971; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Li et al., 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). According to Basuroy, Desai and Talukdar (2006) clients believe less on publicizing to determine product quality once an autarchic reference of data becomes accessible. Electronic WoM is an autonomous source (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Furthermore, electronic WoM has a much higher influence on purchasers as compared to different types of advertising (Day, 1971). Electronic WoM is a key measure by which consumers can acquire data about product quality (Chevalier, 2006).

Many researches have realized the strong influence of word-of-mouth (WoM) on the formation of consumer purchase for both goods and services (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Arndt, 1967; East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008; Sheth, 1971; Keaveney, 1995; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). It is among the most powerful and ubiquitous forces that exist organically in the economy (Day 1971; Kozinets, Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010; Kleina, Ahlfb, & Sharmac, 2015; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). WoM is the significant idea behind 20–50% of all buying decisions (Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik, 2010; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024) because of its inadequacy to observe commercial interests in contrast to firms managed media for instance commercials (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003; Wang, 2011; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). Independent WoM can make distinction between commercial success and failure by representing a given product or service either superior or inferior. Therefore, firms should be aware of the extent of relationship between their products selling value and independent WoM when formulating cost and socializing strategies (Ouardighi, Feichtingerb, Grassb, Hartlc, & Kortd, 2016).

According to Misner (1999), WoM is important factor in company success in contrast to paid marketing and around the globe marketability of social media (almost 2.22 billion users) through sharing (Dellarocas, 2003; Statistica, 2016). Customers are now more informed and aware of a company's goods and services because to the growth of the internet. The internet is used by consumers at every step of the decision-making process, including before, during, and after a purchase (Grewal et al., 2014; Lin & Lin, 2018; Moise et al., 2019; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). Electronic WoM varies from old WoM because of its potential to engage a large number of audiences due to the use of internet (Black & Kelley, 2009). One more difference is that information pursing consumer is unaware about the origin of the statement (Black & Kelley, 2009; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007; Bronner & De Hoog, 2010; Zoghlami et al., 2018 Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Sepac et al., 2024). Electronic WoM contrary to WoM is viewed as data that does not "disappear as soon as it is expressed" (Stern, 1994, pp. 5-15). Relatively content that is published globally on the internet is accessed and is stored for unlimited period (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008). Consumer can use the data several times at any instant for their easiness (Xie et al., 2011; Zoghlami et al., 2018; Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Sepac et al., 2014; Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Sepac et al., 2024).

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Word-of-mouth (WoM) has seen numerous name changes with the development of technology and the internet, including electronic WoM, viral marketing, email marketing, and WoM marketing. Viral marketing is associated with electronic media WoM. The fundamental component of viral marketing that sets it apart from conventional WoM is the internet. (Goyette et al., 2010). A considerable thought that gets out of control in the specified viewers, a trendsetting idea that promotes through a fragment of the population, enlightening, transforming and impacting everybody it reaches is known as viral. It is also referred as to a term virus or widespread (Godin, 2001). Electronic WoM in contrast to conventional WoM consists of thousands of participants in virtual communities (Baber, Thurasamy, Malik, Sadiq, Islam, & Sajjad, 2016). Favorable WoM has been mostly utilized by experts in order to evaluate effect of the marketing tools e.g. publicizing and also in the similar way utilized as reliable origin for obtaining data regarding the product (Li & Zhan, 2011). Consumers often enquire through social media contacts for guidance during purchase of latest products and more frequently purchase items recommended by others. Furthermore, they persuade their social media contacts to purchase products that they favor along with good reviews. Similarly, it is the act of informing the effect of consumers pursuing and uttering through social media (Sukia et al., 2016; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

For both producers and consumers, referral intention has grown in importance as a marketing channel. Most companies use referrals to prepare their best customers. (Bergholz & Nickols, 2001; Silverman, 2001; Johnson et al., 2003). Consumers frequently search referrals during purchase (Misner, 1994; Cates, 2004) in light of the fact that word-of-mouth (WoM) is extremely credible (Arndt, 1967; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Day, 1971; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). According to Reichheld (2003), a customer's tendency to suggest a product to others known as referral value. It is the most significant success measure in business these days. Reichheld (2003) proclaims that Referral value is more strongly correlated with business performance than traditional metrics like customer happiness. Referrals typically happen in one of two ways: 1) customers give names of prospective client to service givers or 2) Customers provide the names of service providers to potential customers (Pettit-O'Malley et al., 1993; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Research Problem

Bahawalpur is the 13th most populous metropolitan area of Pakistan with population of 950,000 (Demographia, 2016; FBSP, 1998; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Bifkovics et al., 2024). Fast food utlization is currently on a fast track. Pakistanis from all socio-ecnimic class have rushed onto the trend of prepackaged food utlization (Ahmed, 2015). Marketing is essential for franchises to make progress in their relevant business. Formely during neglible contest, the resturants did not realize the significance of marketing but it is vice versa situation in recent times as competition has progressed and major forign brands e.g. Subway and Chicken Cottage etc. operates (Haq, 2013; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). Customer refferral is an important measure of success in business and has higher correlation to firm performance (Reichheld, 2003). Referrals can be defined as promising WoM or suggestions targeted toward prospective consumers (Helm 2003; Wheiler 1987; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Researchers should give major consideration to electronic WoM (Litvin et al., 2008; Cheung et al., 2008) recommending that Online reviews must to be considered and assessed as part of the business's marketing strategy (Ye et al., 2009; Gretzel et al., 2000; Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). It is difficult task to manage electronic WoM as tool of marketing and has effect on customer-to-customer interaction to provide favorable decision of purchase (Kozinets et al., 2010; Kleina et al., 2015; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

This assists the investigator to subsequent statement of problem:

"Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) has lately become marketing technique, greatly utilized by the fast- food companies of Bahawalpur. Since it acts as the only channel for customer referrals, therefore the fast-food companies have become dependent upon it. This creates pressure to deliver consumer trust, service quality, product quality & perceived value, so that WoM gets propagated electronically and acts as a reliable source of customer referrals."

Research Objective

The target of this study is to examine following objectives:

- 1. To examine the effect of Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, and Product Quality with Electronic word-of-mouth.
- 2. To evaluate the impact of Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, and Product Quality on Referral Intention.
- 3. To investigate mediation of electronic word-of-mouth between Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, and Product Quality and referral intention.

Research Question

The following research questions are derived:

- 1. What is the impact of Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, and Product Quality on Electronic word-of-mouth?
- 2. What is the impact of Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, and Product Quality on Referral Intention?
- 3. Does Electronic word-of-mouth mediate the relationship between Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, and Product Quality?

Significance of Study

The study's conclusions help practitioners and scholars alike gain a deeper understanding of the significance of electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) referral intention, and important factors. The research's conclusions provide valuable insight into the efficacy of electronic WoM. Besides being smaller city Bahawalpur is rushed with number of fast-food outlets which has developed a very competitive situation for the marketing experts. This situation has increased the importance of electronic WoM as prompting tool generating customer referral.

The true influence of electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) in the fast-food industry has not been thoroughly studied. Since this study is the first to examine the phenomenon of electronic WoM and its relevance, it greatly aids in the investigation of the actual impact of electronic WoM on increasing referral intention in the Bahawalpur fast food industry.

Thus, findings of this research are of substantial significance to marketing practitioners to formulate strategies in order to meet needs of never-ending competitive market by carving customer referrals through positive electronic WoM.

GAP Analysis

word-of-mouth (WoM) has been broadly explored across several decades (Bauer & Gleicher, 1953; Trusov, 2009; Dichter, 1966; Whyte, 1958; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024)

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turning out to be more noticeable since the 1970's. Numerous studies focus on WoM; not very many have concentrated on a measure of WoM, particularly with regards to e-services. The idea of viral marketing (Godin, 2001) which depicts present day variant of WoM, in like manner exhibits the criticalness of WoM in an online scenario. Previous study only probes WoM messages in one-to-one context. Therefore, in the field of e-services, a multifaceted WoM measurement scale must be created. (Nikookar, Rahrovy, Razi, & Ghassemi, 2015). Thus, present study is conducted in multi-dimensional scale by using electronic WoM.

Previous studies acknowledge the intense impact of word-of-mouth (WoM) on the buyer's purchasing choice procedure for both goods and services (Sheth, 1971; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). Basuroy et al. (2006) observe that if reliable information is accessible, customers depend less on advertising to evaluate the quality of products. WoM is effective, has a bigger effect on customers than other marketing strategies, and may be evaluated in relation to products (Day, 1971; Nikookar et al., 2015). However, product quality and WoM relationship is less studied. Hence, there is need to empirically examine product quality as an influential factor of WoM (Nikookar et al., 2015; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Thus, present studies fulfill the gap in literature by investigating the effect of influential factors (perceived value, service quality, consumer trust, and product quality) on electronic WoM and referral intention. Moreover, this study explore mediating role of WoM between influential factors and referral intention.

Operational Definitions

Operational definition of perceived value

Consumers' overall assessment of a product's usefulness based on their perception of its benefits and drawbacks is known as perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988).

Operational definition of service quality

Service quality is behavior of the consumer relating to the results from distinguishing between beliefs of service with his perceptions of actual performance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985, 1988; Gronroos, 1984).

Operational definition of consumer trust

Trust is the belief of one group on another's group's goodwill (Moorman, Deshpandé, & Zaltman, 1993).

Operational definition of product quality

Performance, features, and durability are the main focuses of product quality; aesthetics and perceived quality are the focus of the user-based approach; and conformity and dependability are the focus of the manufacturing approach (Garvin D. A., 1984).

Operational definition of electronic word-of-mouth (WoM)

All informal interactions with customers that are facilitated by online innovation and linked to the use or attributes of particular goods or services, or their providers (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan's, 2008, pp. 458-468).

Operational definition of referral intention

The purpose of a referral is to bring in a new client, thus even while the firm's previous clients may recommend the business to others, this does not constitute referral activity until at least one nonclient is involved (Misner and Davis, 1997).

Literature Review

The relationships between variables (Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, and Product Quality, word-of-mouth (WoM), and Referral Intention) are rationalized in light of theories alongside. Hypotheses have been developed on the basis of theoretical analysis.

Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM)

"All non-formal communications coordinated to consumers through Internet-based innovation identified with the use or attributes of specific products or services, or their sellers" is called as electronic WoM (Litvin et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). Electronic WoM is recognized as general sharing between people who are unknown to each other and without social connection. Electronic WoM has become a prominent due to quantity, accuracy and rate of online exchanges (King et al., 2014; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Electronic media has become a critical phenomenon due to rapid growth of internet. According to Buttle (1998), Electronic WoM definition must include computer-based communication such as blogs, online discussion forums, and electronic mails (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Sadovykh et al., 2015; Verbraken et al., 2014; Money et al., 1998; Silverman, 1997; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024).

Backing the view, electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) is explained as "any favorable or unfavorable remark made by potential, actual, or former consumer regarding product or firm, which is made accessible to a large number of people and organizations through internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). Such Characteristics empower virtual sites viewers to interact and link with more frequentness (Kleina, Ahlfb, & Sharmac, 2015).

Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) in contrast to traditional WoM shows that it has significant credibility, empathy and relevance to consumers than market-generated references of data online (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). WoM content is easy to track, duplicate and examine by the utilization of web (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). The fast growth of internet with increased communication potential has considerably enhanced the scale and scope of WoM communication. Online reviews, online WoM, and the most recent information from clients who have purchased and utilized the product are becoming essential sources of information for buyers (Chinho et al., 2013). In spite of the importance of WoM communication in decision making, negligible investigators have examined and quantified the entire purchase procedure in which WoM communication is engaged and given the massive increase in online communication, it is astounding that only a negligible investigator have examined the dimension of how a hearer utilizes WoM in the virtual world (Martin & Lueg, 2013; Xu et al., 2020; My, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024).

Perceived Value

Perceived value has lured significant awareness in both industry and academia in recent era (Sternberg, 1997; Tussyadiah, 2014). A user's thorough assessment of a product's utility based on what is accomplished and forgotten is known as perceived value (Yi, Day, & Cai, 2014; Zeithaml, 1988). It is also defined as exchange between advantages and disadvantages or among superiority and inferiority which can be distinguished into financial and emotional sacrifices (Monroe, 1990;

Dodds & Monroe, 1991; Flint, Woodruff & Gardial, 2002; Gronroos, 2000; Payne & Holt, 2001). Cost and acquisition costs are the main financial sacrifices, but they are eventually expanded to encompass non-financial considerations like the possibility of subpar performance. (Liljanderet al., 1993; Monroe, 1990). Moreover, Woodruff (2007) describes that perceived value is consumer's perceived priority for and assessment of those product characteristics, performance traits and outcome appearing from usage of that service achieving consumers aim and objectives of usage in particular context. According to the aforementioned explanation, customer value has two sides: (1) perceived value and (2) desired value. Preferences for a good or service are related to desired value. The advantage that a customer feels they receive after purchasing a product is known as perceived value (Shanker, 2012).

The more intensely a person perceives high value by product or service, there is greater possibility of him to get convinced to purchase and vice versa (Muturi, Wadawi, & Owino, 2014). It is one of the indicators of repurchase intentions (Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000; Morar, 2013). However, perceived value is always specific to the content (Flint et al., 2002; Rescher, 1969; Sheth, Newman & Gross, 1991; Woodruff, 2013).

Numerous studies have shown that one factor influencing word-of-mouth (WoM) is perceived value (Hartline & Jones, 1996; Keiningham et al., 2007; Gruen et al., 2006). It is also realized as a potential indicator of behavioral intention (Kim, 2014).

Service Quality

Service quality is perspective of consumers associating to the outcome from differentiations among beliefs of service with idea of actual achievement (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988). As a result, evaluating the quality of a service involves more than just determining its outcome; it also involves evaluating the process of providing the service. Though these aspects have a significant influence on a service company's future projections, their precise effects may vary depending on the particular service experience (Bitner, 1990).

Service excellence and word-of-mouth (WoM) has prominent relationship in service industry, an absence of seeing still exists in regards to client attributes, a basic benefactor to the WoM influence (Sun & Qu, 2011). WoM is recognized as both an outcome of service quality and precursor (Bolton et al., 2004; Rust et al., 1995; Heskett et al., 1994). Behavioral responses have a basic association with clients' view about service quality (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Clients often recommend the services of the organization when they have positive perceptions about service quality and they convey negative WoM about the organization when they assess undesirable service quality.

Factual researches have revealed that service excellence is one of the determinants to ascertain word-of-mouth (WoM) (Bloemer et al., 1999). Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) characterized service quality in following dimensions: (1) Tangibles, (2) Reliability, (3) Responsiveness, (4) Assurance and (5) Empathy.

Consumer Trust

Trust is the belief of one group on another's group's goodwill (Moorman et al. 1993). There is higher propensity of a customer to distribute to word-of-mouth (WoM) about an organization, when level of consumer trust is higher among customers (Ranaweera & Pranbhu, 2003; Bergeron et al., 2003; Zoghlami et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2020; Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Sepac et al., 2024). The cognitive state comprising the intent to accept risk based on belief of intent or conduct

of another is known as trust (Rousseau et al., 1998). It is of substantial significance in the activity of developing and sustaining relation, however it is troublesome to manage (Bejou et al., 1998). It a is key catalyst in many transactional associations and acts as crucial determinant in building long lasting associations (Verlegh & Moldovan, 2008; Belanche et al., 2012; Zoghlami et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2020; Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Sepac et al., 2024). McKnight and Chervany (2002) stated that trust lasts to the level that a person ascertains a company to be trustworthy and magnanimous. The primarily benefit of trust in developing strong associations has been investigated frequently in the marketing literature (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The more intensely a person trusts on service provider, there is greater possibility of him to get convinced with association and likely to give referrals (Chiou, 2004).

Trust is conclusive for satisfaction of consumer in online scenario (Coppola et al., 2004; Metzger, 2004). Mostly consumer trust is determined by integrity of company is mostly e.g. integrity, competence, benevolence. Benevolence is the concern regarding consumers and promptly to act in consumers concerns, competence is the skill of the firm to accomplish consumer wants and integrity is truthfulness and oath keeping (McKnight et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2009; Zoghlami et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2020; Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Sepac et al., 2024). In spite of substantial costs by advertiser to connect with focused markets, consumers all over the globe rely heavily on other clients (Nielsen, 2013).

Intriguingly, trust enhances beyond companions and family, with over 87% of online buyers believing on reviews published online as much as trustworthy that of their personal recommendation in a particular situation (Statista, 2014; Zoghlami et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2020; Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Sepac et al., 2024).

Product Quality

Before quality can be determined, it must be understood but there are difficulties because there is no authentic definition available, however, five main methods have been used to create substitute measures: transcendence, product-intended, user-intended, manufacturing-intended, and value-intended (Sebastianelli & Tamimi, 2002; Moise et al., 2019; Boateng, 2021; Li et al., 2023). Performance, features, and durability are identified using the product's core point of view; aesthetics and perceived quality are identified using the consumer's intended way; and conformity and dependability are identified using the production technique (Garvin, 1984). Product intended view point is focused on its reasonable source which dissimilarities of the factors or characteristics attracted by the product are being examined as representing to the dissimilarities in excellence (Garvin, 1984). When the quality of goods and services reaches or surpasses what customers believe, this is the user-intended point of view. There are two types of quality: conformance quality and design quality (Juran, 1951). Quality of design refers to provision of satisfaction to meet wants of consumer by layout of product (Juran, 1974; Moise et al., 2019; Boateng, 2021; Li et al., 2023). Customers are now much better able to gather and share product-related information thanks to the Internet.

Peer-generated product information is now easily accessible to customers worldwide, and they can influence multiple clients by sharing their own skills (Ward & Ostrom, 2003). Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) is significant measure through which consumers can acquire information regarding product quality (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Moise et al., 2019; Boateng, 2021; Li et al., 2023). Various customer research studies have recognized the effective impact of WoM on the buyer's purchasing choice process for both goods and services (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Arndt, 1967; Sheth, 1971). At the point when autarchic source of data gets to be available clients depend less on

publicizing to assess product quality (Basuroy et al., 2006). Electronic WoM is an independent source (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009) and has a much greater effect on consumers than other forms (Day, 1971).

Mostly product quality is considered as an idea to contribute to growth of competitive edge whereas the product is to be planned and developed to meet consumer wants in boosting the product excellence (Benson et al., 991; Flynn et al., 1994; Moise et al., 2019; Boateng, 2021; Li et al., 2023). Namely, product quality has eight attributes: perceived quality, features, reliability, performance, aesthetics, durability, serviceability, conformance and (Garvin, 1984). Perceived product quality is a worlwide evaluation varying from "bad" to "good", distinguished by a larger abstraction degree and indicates to a particular utilization theme (Tsiotsou, 2005).

Relationship between perceived value and electronic word-of-mouth (WoM)

Value refers to the client's general evaluation of the goods in view of discernments of what is achieved and forgotten (Zeithaml, 1988). Value has been additionally been portrayed as the trade off in the middle of advantages and give up (Payne & Holt, 2001). Several findings have demonstrated that the perceived value is one of the forecasters of WoM (Hartline & Jones, 1996; Keiningham et al., 2007; Gruen et al., 2006).

Relationship between service quality and electronic word-of-mouth (WoM)

Word-of-mouth (WoM) and Service quality has distinguished relationship in service industry, service quality is basic contributor to the WoM influence (Sun & Qu, 2011). WoM is recognized as both an outcome of service excellence and antecedent (Bolton et al., 2004; Heskett et al., 1994; Rust et al., 1995; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Relationship between consumer trust and electronic word-of-mouth (WoM)

There are more chances of customer to spread positive word-of-mouth (WoM) about company when consumer trust is favorable among customers (Ranaweera & Pranbhu, 2003; Bergeron et al., 2003).

Relationship between product quality and electronic word-of-mouth (WoM)

Word-of-mouth (WoM) has significant effect on the buyer's purchasing choice process for both goods and services (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Arndt, 1967; Sheth, 1971). In presence of authentic source such as WoM, customers rely less on advertising to determine product quality (Basuroy et al., 2006; Hoye & Lievens, 2009; Mofokeng et al., 2022; Bifkovics et al., 2024).

Referral Intention

Company's prior consumers may exchange favorable word-of-mouth (WoM) with one another but it does not depict referral actions until it includes at least one non-consumer, because starting a new client is the anticipated outcome of a recommendation (Misner & Davis 1997; Alhulail, et al., 2019; Goraya et al., 2021; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2024). Consequently, Referrals may be described as promising WoM, or suggestions, targeted toward prospective consumers (Wheiler, 1987; Helm 2003; Swan & Oliver 1989; Walker 1995; Amron et al., 2018; Yuan et al., 2020; Azzam & Al-Shaer, 2022; Bifkovics et al., 2024). Referral Intention illustrates significant type of marketing channel for both producers and clients. Referrals assume crucial part in securing best clients of various organizations (Bergholz & Nickols, 2001; Silverman, 2001; Johnson et al., 2003). WoM is seen extraordinarily persuasive when client's search for referrals when they intend to buy something (Arndt, 1967; Day, 1971; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Cates, 2004; Misner, 1994; Alhulail, et al., 2019; Goraya et al., 2021; Rajapaksha et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2024).

Reichheld (2003) states that a consumer's tendency to suggest a product to others is described as referral value and is the most influential favorable outcome to determine business nowadays. Reichheld argues that referral value is more closely related to business performance than traditional metrics like customer satisfaction. Convinced customers are more inclined to recommend businesses than dissatisfied ones. It is not astonishing, thus, that researchers have found consumer contentedness to be a favorable forecaster of referrals (Swan & Oliver, 1989). In internet intended WoM, electronic WoM has become a significant factual source for buyers before they acquire the product (Chinho et al., 2013). Additionally, referrals usually occur in the two ways listed below: 1) Clients provide the names of potential clients to their service providers, or 2) Clients provide the names of service providers to potential clients (Pettit-O'Malley et al., 1993). WoM frequently works as a referral of service giver at the point when it is positive (Anderson, 1998).

Relationship between perceived value and referral intention

Customer perceived value is found to influence purchase intention (Li & Petrick, 2008; Urška Tuškej, 2013; Lin & Lin, 2018; Xu et al., 2020; ; Lim et al., 2022; Sepac et al., 2024). Because customers who feel they have gained a rather superior value are more loyal to the company and try to persuade the representatives of the relevant faction to be loyal to that company, perceived value has an impact on consumers' behavioral intentions, particularly on WoM (McKee et al., Licata, 2006; Hartline & Jones, 1996; Zoghlami et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2020; Lakchan & Samaraweera, 2022; Sepac et al., 2024).

Relationship between service quality and referral intention

Company can differentiate from the competition by customizing their services to fit the customers' needs better through identifying the features of service quality that the customers value the most (Trivedi, 2014). Clients often recommend the services of the organization when they have positive perceptions about service quality (Bloemer, de Ruyter, & Wetzels, 1999) and can be said as positive forecaster of referrals (Swan & Oliver, 1989; Mofokeng et al., 2022; Manandhar, 2023; Bifkovics et al., 2024).

Relationship between consumer trust and referral intention

More trust between consumers and businesses is required, since a customer's perception of hazard can be decreased by mutual trust (Dahlstrom, Nygaard, Kimasheva, & Ulvnes, 2014) The more intensely a person trusts on service provider, there is greater possibility of him to get convinced with association and likely to give referrals (Chiou, 2004). Therefore, customer satisfaction is said to be favorable predictor of referrals (Swan & Oliver, 1989; Mofokeng et al., 2022; Bifkovics et al., 2024.

Relationship between product quality and referral intention

Product quality is strongly recognized when a customer has faith on organization (Gul, 2014). These days, customers may easily view product details anywhere in the world and influence many other customers by sharing their own experiences (Ward & Ostrom, 2003; Mofokeng et al., 2022; My, 2023; Bifkovics et al., 2024).

Mediation between electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) and referral intention

Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) is an essential concept for researchers and marketers to understand. According to earlier research, it is necessary to examine and test experimentally the mediating function of electronic WoM in relation to the elements that can significantly influence customers' favorable perceptions of a particular brand (Nikookar et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2019; Zulkiffli et al., 2021; Afdhal & Khatimah, 2023; Sepac et al., 2024). The current study outlines how electronic WoM mediates the relationship between referral intention and influential factors (service quality, perceived value, consumer trust, and product quality).

Theoretical Framework



Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Hypotheses

H1: PV has a positive significant effect on the formation of EWOM.

H2: SQ has positive significant effects on the formation of EWOM.

H3: CT has a positive significant effect on the formation of EWOM.

H4: PQ has a positive significant effect on the formation of EWOM.

H5: PV has a positive significant effect on the formation of RI.

H6: SQ has a positive significant effect on the formation of RI.

H7: CT has a positive significant effect on the formation of RI.

H8: PQ has a positive significant effect on the formation of RI.

H9: EWOM has a positive significant effect on RI.

H10: EWOM mediates the relationship between PV and RI.

H11: EWOM mediates the relationship between SQ and RI.

H12: EWOM mediates the relationship between CT and RI.

H13: EWOM mediates the relationship between PQ and RI.

Research Methodology

The strategies and procedures listed below are used to gather information for research design and methodology. It contains information about the study's instruments, sampling strategies, validity, reliability and data analysis procedures.

Research Approach and Design

This study is a causal and uses quantitative approach. The objective of this study is to develop clear understanding of the effect of influential factors (perceived value, service quality, consumer trust, and product quality) on electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) and referral intention; explore mediating role of electronic WoM between influential factors and referral intention.

Quantitative research is conventional, factual, methodical process to illustrate and experiment association and evaluate basis and impact associations among variables (Burns & Grove, 2005). Reviews are utilized for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory research. The gathering of authentic statistics to elaborate populace too massive to spot directly is called survey (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster, & Prozesky, 2001). Survey inquires data from specimen of populace by means of self-assessment, that is, people respond to numerous queries put forward by analyzer (Polit & Hungler, 1993). The investigator administers self-assessed questionnaires to each respondent individually in order to collect data for this study. Because it offers a precise reflection or record of characteristics, such as behavior, thinking, capability, faith, and awareness of a certain person, circumstance, or group, a descriptive survey was selected (Burns & Grove, 1993).



Research Setting

The research setting of current research is non-contrived and was completely conducted in natural setting without minimal influence of researcher.

The Study Population and Sample

Populace is described as entire segments (individuals, objects and occasions) that cope with sample requirements for addition in research (Burns and Grove, 1993). The study of population consisted of Punjab College, Best College and University students of NCBA&E Bahawalpur who consume fast food.

Sample is the selected segments with the purpose of obtaining out something about entire populace under consideration (Mouton, 1996). The sample which consists of respondents comprised in research because they happen to be in best position or place to take advantage of an opportunity (Polit & Hungler 1993). The query that how big a specimen should be assessed is respective label in the literature. Every research has its independent census and thus no specimen can be assessed

as statistically favorable (Kinnear & Tayler, 1987). The specimen greater than 30 and lesser than 500 is sufficient for most of studies (Rosoco, 1975). For the majority of research investigations, a sample size of at least 30 but not more than 500 members is sufficient (Rosoco, 1975). In many investigations, a sample size of fifty to a thousand members is more than sufficient (Comrey & Lee, 1992). The description is given in below table 1:

Sr.	Participants	
1	<50	Weaker
2	100	Weak
3	200	Adequate
4	300	Good
5	500	Very Good
6	1000	Excellent

Table 1: Sample Size(s)

Therefore, we consider sample size for this study will be consisted of 400 respondents.

Data Collection

Data collection instrument

Questionnaire is published self-assessed format intended to illustrate facts that may be acquired through the in black and white answers of the respondents (Burns & Grove, 1993). Questionnaires are used to gather information in order to assess Bahawalpur consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding fast food. Closed-ended questions are provided because they are easier to administer and assess (Polit & Hungler, 1993). Questions assessing consumer experience about services of fast food, perception of fast food, relationship between employees and consumers and the quality of food provided are also included.

Data collection procedure

The researcher distributes questionnaires to Punjab College and Best College students and to university students of NCBA&E Bahawalpur. The data is collected over a period of one month.

Measurement of variables

To measure the construct, well established scale is adapted from literature. All the items are measured on the basis of five-point Likert scale. Perceived value is measured through questions adapted by Yasvari et al., 2012. Service quality is measured through questions adapted by Chaniotakis et al. 2009. Consumer trust is measured through questions adapted by Buil et al. 2013. Referral Intention is measured through questions adapted by Hagenbuch et al. 2008 (Question 1 & 2) and Yasvari et al. 2012 (Question 3). Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) is measured through questions adapted by Yasvari et al. 2012. Scale of measurement for variables is given below in table 2:

Variables	Dimensions	No. of items	Adapted from study
Perceived Value		3	(Yasvari, Ghassemi, & Rahrovy, 2012)
Service Quality	Tangibility Reliability Responsiveness Assurance Empathy	16	(Chaniotakis, Constantine, & Lymperopoulos, 2009)
Consumer Trust		3	(M.B. Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001)
Product Quality	Perceived Quality	4	(Buil, Martínez, & Leslie, 2013)
Electronic WoM		3	(Yasvari, Ghassemi, & Rahrovy, 2012)
Referral Intention		2	(Hagenbuch, Wiese, Dose, & Bruce, 2008)
		1	(Yasvari, Ghassemi, & Rahrovy, 2012)

Table 2: Scale of Measurement for	Variables
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Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability, according to Polit and Hungler (1993), is the consistency with which an instrument chooses the characteristics it is intended to assess. The set of questions that fast food customers answered revealed consistency in their responses. Reliability was made sure by investigators being the only one to manage the question sheet, and normalizing states such as revealing alike individual characteristics to all answerers, e.g., kindness and guidance. The tangible and cognitive surroundings where information is acquired is made convenient by verifying secrecy, confidentiality and overall tangible convenience.

Validity

Content validity

It is the state to which an instrument assesses what it is aimed to determine (Polit & Hungler, 1993). It indicates the extent to which an instrument exhibits the determinants under research. To acquire it, set of questions indulged a diversity of queries on the consumers' experiences about fast food and liking's disliking's (Polit & Hungler 1993). Queries are developed on factors accumulated throughout the literature assessment to make sure that they are indicative of influential factors (perceived value, service quality, consumer trust, and product quality), electronic WoM and referral intention. Moreover, content validity is made sure by persistency in managing the set of questions. All question sheets are distributed to answerers by the investigator individually. The set of questions are formulated in easy language for clear cut understanding.

Face validity

It indicates to if the trial "looks valid", the researcher whom conducts, the managerial people by whom decision is made for its implication and additional methodically non-technical observers (Anastasi, 1988, p.144)." Professionals and non-professional opinions are asked about validity of test. However, non-professional opinion does not authenticate face validity into a favorable strategy. All suggestions are quantified to compute calculations of using statistical analysis. When the trappings of actual studies are exerted to the professionals views it is not difficult to forego glimpse of the aspects that they are, ultimately, the views of commoner about the state to which the trial "looks valid" to them. In the current research both variables and questionnaires taken are empirically tested before in previous researches. Therefore, it is deduced that professionals will mostly report that the test "looks valid" to them. Therefore, a quantitative face validity process will almost constantly give visible assistance for authenticity confirm. This is correct despite of either or not the test is really authenticated.

Pretesting the Questionnaire

A pretest indicates to a trial supervision of an instrument to figure out defects. When a set of questions is utilized as an information accumulating measure, it is mandatory to assess if queries and instructions are obvious to answerers (Polit & Hungler, 1995).

The investigator pretests the questionnaire on 50 answerers at NCBA&E Bahawalpur using SPSS 17 given in table 3 below. The questionnaire is found reliable and valid. Everyone responded the queries and neither of queries are altered. However, addition of two further dialogue boxes, first one is addition of metric in qualification row and the second one is additional dialogue for fast food restaurant other than the listed options were indulged in questionnaire. The questionnaire is enlisted in appendix.

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Service Quality	0.898	16
Perceived Value	0.799	3
Consumer Trust	0.793	3
Product Quality	0.845	4
Electronic word-of-mouth	0.865	3
Referral Intention	0.840	3
Total	0.872	32

Table 3: Factor Wise Reliability Statistics of Trial Questionnaire

The data is more authentic if it is nearer to alpha value 1. Commonly under 0.6 reliabilities are observed to be unfavorable or bad, those in the 0.70 are agreeable and those over 0.80 are observed favorable or good (Sekaran, 2003). Consequently, it can be said that the data gathered for this study was trustworthy and reputable. The study's 16 Service Quality items had the highest Cronbach's alpha (.898), indicating that they were highly reliable, while the 32 items had a Cronbach's alpha of.872, indicating that every item was deemed trustworthy.

Ethical Considerations

Study administration requires not only competence and diligence but also morality and honesty. Respondents' rights are acknowledged and protected in this way. Rights to self-evaluation, ambiguity, secrecy, and informed consent are evaluated in order to support the study's ethical considerations.

Oral consent is acquired from authorities of Best College, Punjab College and NCBA&E University Bahawalpur. All students participated voluntarily on researcher request. Respondent are intimated about the objective of the research, the procedures that would be utilized to gather the data, and make sure secrecy. In the beginning of questionnaire, data is given regarding the investigator in the occurrence of queries or complaints.

Data Analysis

After the information is gathered it was structured and assessed. For assessment of questionnaire, a computer software program known as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) is utilized. Information is assessed by utilizing demographic analysis, reliability tests, descriptive statistics, single regression analysis, multiple regression analysis and regression analysis for mediation.

Data Analysis and Results

Following are the data analysis and results of the study, major outcomes and discussion of the research in relation to the goal of this study. The software program which has been utilized for this research is SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Reliability Test Results

Table 4: Reliability Statistics (Factor Wise)

Name of the Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Service Quality	0.845	16
Perceived Value	0.695	3
Consumer Trust	0.762	3
Product Quality	0.775	4
Electronic word-of-mouth	0.731	3
Referral Intention	0.635	3
Total	0.908	32

Reliability tests depict that information from this study is reliable with Cronbach's alpha value of at least 0.70 as shown in Table 4. The data is more authentic if it is nearer to alpha value 1. Commonly under 0.6 reliabilities are observed to be unfavorable or bad, those in the 0.70 are agreeable and those over 0.80 are observed favorable or good (Sekaran, 2003). Thus it can be concluded that the information accumulated through this study is reliable and accepted. The highest Cronbach's alpha for the 16 items in Service Quality is .845 in this study and is highly

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reliable. The Cronbach's alpha for the 32 items is .908 which shows that all items have been found reliable in this research.

The Demographic Analysis

		Freq.	Per.	Valid Per.	Cumul. Per.
Gender	Male	261	65.3	65.3	65.3
	Female	139	34.8	34.8	100
	Total	400	100	100	
Age	< 20	164	41.0	41.0	41.0
	20-30	204	51.0	51.0	92.0
	31-40	21	5.3	5.3	97.3
	>40	11	2.8	2.8	100
	Total	400	100	100	
Marital Status	Single	336	84.0	84.0	84.0
	Married	64	16.0	16.0	100
	Total	400	100	100	
Family	Nuclear	168	42.0	42.0	42.0
	Joint	232	58.0	58.0	100
	Total	400	100	100	
Monthly Income	Dependent	249	62.3	62.3	62.3
	15000-24999	57	14.3	14.3	76.5
	25000-34999	37	9.3	9.3	85.8
	>35000	57	14.3	14.3	100
	Total	400	100	100	

Table 5: Demographic Analysis

All questionnaires are duly filled by respondents. A total of 261 (65.3%) respondents are male, 204 (51%) respondents are aged between 20-30, 336 (84%) respondents are single, 232 (58%) respondents lived in joint family, 154 (38.5%) respondents are metric or intermediate qualified, 249 (62.3%) respondents are dependent for their income, 225 (56.3%) respondents' occupation are others, which was mostly referred for students.

Reliability Test: Mean and Standard Deviation

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Devi	Skew	Kurt
	Stat	Stat	Stat	Stat	Stat	Stat
Per value	1.00	5.00	3.6258	.78040	571	.419
Serq	1.00	5.00	3.6355	.53485	497	1.506

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics

СТ	1.00	5.00	3.5033	.84498	378	-0.79
PQ	1.00	5.00	3.6413	.75076	652	.987
EWOM	1.00	5.00	3.6142	.81258	540	.378
RI	1.00	5.00	3.6892	.70270	546	.596

Perv: Perceived Value, Serq: Service Quality, CT: Consumer Trust, PQ: Product Quality, EW: Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM), RI: Referral Intention

Based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), 400 respondents provided their average score for the influential variables of electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) and referral intention, which is displayed in Table 6. It shows that the average score for perceived value is 3.6258, service quality is 3.6355, consumer trust is 3.5033 and product quality is 3.6413. In contrast, the average score for referral intention is 3.6892 and electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) is 3.6142. In addition, skewness and kurtosis values show how flat and steep the data's normal distribution is.

Correlation

 Table 7: Correlation of Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, Product Quality,

 Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM) and Referral Intention

	Perv	Serq	СТ	PQ	EW	RI
Perv						
Serq	$.404^{**}$					
СТ	$.400^{**}$.461**				
PQ	.421***	.455***	.527**			
EW	$.408^{**}$.421***	.503**	.484***		
RI	.381**	.465***	.541**	.462**	.484**	

** Correlation is significant at p< 0.01 level (two-tailed), Perv: Perceived Value, Serq: Service Quality, CT: Consumer Trust, PQ: Product Quality, EW: Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM), RI: Referral Intention

All variables are positively correlated. However, consumer trust and referral intention are highly correlated.

Testing Assumptions of Regression Analysis in Term of Multicollinearity, Independence of Error, Normality of Data and Heteroskedasticity.

Multiple regressions

 Table 8: Regression Analysis of Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, Product

 Quality and Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM)

UnStd		nStd	l Std		
Model	В	Std. Er	В	Т	Sig.
(Constant)	.524	.240		2.187	.029
Perceived Value	.162	.049	.155	3.326	.001
Service Quality	.211	.074	.139	2.864	.004

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Consumer Trust	.252	.048	.262	5.212	.000
Product Quality	.235	.055	.217	4.286	.000

N = 400, R = .599, R square = .358, adjusted R square = .352; F = 55.135 (p < 0.01);

**Significance, p < .01; a. Dependent Variable: Electronic word-of-mouth (WoM)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, Product Quality.

Table 6 displays the results of the hypothesis analysis using multiple regressions (H1, H2, H3, H4). The findings of the (H1, H2, H3, and H4) hypothesis (f = 55.135; P < 0.01), R-squared = 0.358, and adj. R-squared = 0.352. The hypothesis (H1, H2, H3, and H4) was accepted, and the P-value of 0.01 was less than 0.05 and statistically significant. F-value shows that the model is significant.

The result of the (H1) hypothesis (B = .162; β =.155; t = 3.326). The R-square value states that approximately 36% variation in electronic WoM is due to perceived value. The result of the (H2) hypothesis (B = .211; β =.139; t = 2.864). The R-square value states that approximately 36% variation in electronic WoM is due to service quality.

The result of the (H3) hypothesis (B = .252; β =.262; t = 5.212). The R-square value states that approximately 36% variation in electronic WoM is due to consumer trust. The result of the (H4) hypothesis (B = 235; β =.217; t = 4.286). The R-square value states that approximately 36% variation in electronic WoM is due to product quality.

	U	nStd	Std Std		
Model	В	Std. Er	В	Т	Sig.
(Constant)	.908	.204		4.460	.000
Perceived Value	.094	.041	.104	2.265	.024
Service Quality	.266	.062	.203	4.263	.000
Consumer Trust	.270	.041	.325	6.571	.000
Product Quality	.145	.046	.155	3.123	.002

 Table 9: Regression Analysis of Perceived Value, Service Quality, Consumer Trust,

 Product Quality and Referral Intention

N = 400, R = .617, R square = .381, adjusted R square = .375; F = 60.826 (p < 0.01); **Significance, p < .01 a. Dependent Variable: Referral Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived value, Service quality, Consumer Trust, Product Quality

Multiple regressions are used to analyze the results of hypothesis are shown in table 6 (H5, H6, H7, H8). The results of the (H5, H6, H7, H8) hypothesis (R-square = 0.381; Adj. R-square = 0.375; f = 60.826; P < 0.01). The P-value 0.01 which is less than 0.05 and statistically significant and the hypothesis (H5, H6, H7, H8) accepted. F-value shows that the model is significant.

The result of the (H5) hypothesis (B = .094; β =.104; t = 2.265). The R-square value states that approximately 38% variation in referral intention is due to perceived value. The result of the (H6) hypothesis (B = .266; β =.203; t = 4.263). The R-square value states that approximately 38% variation in referral intention is due to service quality. The result of the (H7) hypothesis (B = .270; β =.325; t = 6.571). The R-square value states that approximately 38% variation in referral intention is due to consumer trust. The result of the (H8) hypothesis (B = .145; β =.155; t = 3.123). The R-square value states that approximately 38% variation in referral intention is due to product guality.

Linear regression

	UnSt	td	Std		
Model	В	Std. Er	В	Т	Sig.
(Constant)	2.175	.140		15.485	.000
Electronic WoM	.419	.038	.484	11.046	.000

Table 10: Regression Analysis of Electronic WoM and Referral Intention

N = 400, R = .484, R square = .235, adjusted R square = .233; F = 122.024 (p < 0.01); **Significance, p < .01, a. Dependent Variable: Referral Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Electronic WoM

Linear regression is used to analyze the result of hypothesis are shown in table 6 (H9). The result of the (H9) hypothesis (R-square = 0.235; Adj. R-square = 0.233; B = .419; β =.484; f = 122.024; t = 11.046; P < 0.01). The P-value 0.01 which is less than 0.05 and statistically significant and the hypothesis (H9) accepted. The R-square value states that approximately 23% variation in referral intention is due to electronic WoM.

Regression analysis for mediation.

Table 11: Regression Analysis for Mediation of Perceived Value and Electronic We	oM on
Referral Intention	

Steps	IV	DV	\mathbf{R}^{2}	F Stat	В	Beta	t value
Step 1	PV	RI	.145	67.590	.343	.381	8.221
Step 2	PV	EW	.166	79.319	.424	.408	8.906
Step 3	EW	RI	.235	122.024	.419	.484	11.046
Step 4	PV	RI	.275	75.313	.198	.220	4.704
	EW				.341	.395	8.434

** Significance level p < 0.01

In accordance with Barron and Kenny's (1986) four phases, the mediation effect is checked. Because of the beta coefficient t-value = 8.221, R square =.145, and standardized coefficient beta =.381, the first step shows that the model is significant. According to the R square value, the predictor accounts for about 14% of the variation in the criteria, and the standardized beta coefficient value accounts for 38% of this model's contribution.

R square is.166, the standardized beta coefficient value is.408, and the beta coefficient t-value is 8.906 for the second mediation step. Regarding the third step, the regression equation displays R square =.235, standardized coefficient beta =.484, and beta coefficient t-value = 11.046. The R square value explains 23% contribution of the model. The fourth step results seem to indicate that beta coefficient t-value PV with RI is significant which is 4.704. Further, beta coefficient t-value of EW with RI is also significant that is 8.434.

This clearly illustrates that mediation exists but partial mediation because t-value of PV with RI and EW with RI both are significance.

Steps	IV	DV	R ²	F Stat	В	Beta	t value
Step 1	SQ	RI	.216	109.664	.611	.465	10.472
Step 2	SQ	EW	.177	85.698	.639	.421	9.257
Step 3	EW	RI	.235	122.024	.419	.484	11.046
Step 4	SQ	RI	.317	92.284	.417	.317	6.936
	EW				.303	.351	7.677

Table 12: Regression Analysis of Service Quality and Electronic WoM on Referral Intention

** Significance level p < 0.01

In order to check mediation effect, four steps are applied according to Barron and Kenny's (1986). The first step indicates that the model is significant because of beta coefficient t-value= 10.472, R square= .216, and standardized coefficient beta= .465. The R square value states that approximately 22% variation in criterion is caused by predictor and standardized beta coefficient value explains 46% contribution of this model. For second mediation step, beta coefficient t-value is 9.257, standardized beta coefficient value is .421, and R square is .177. As far as third step is concerned, regression equation shows beta coefficient t-value= 11.046, standardized coefficient beta= .484, and R square .235. The R square value explains 23% contribution of the model. The fourth step results seem to indicate that beta coefficient t-value SQ with RI is significant which is 6.936. Further, beta coefficient t-value of EW with RI is also significant that is 7.677.

This clearly illustrates that mediation exists but partial mediation because t-value of SQ with RI and SQ with RI both are significance.

 Table 13: Regression Analysis of Consumer Trust and Electronic WoM on Referral

 Intention

Steps	IV	DV	\mathbf{R}^2	F Stat	В	Beta	t value
Step 1	CT	RI	.293	164.971	.450	.541	12.844
Step 2	CT	EW	.253	134.489	.483	.503	11.597
Step 3	EW	RI	.235	122.024	.419	.484	11.046
Step 4	СТ	RI	.353	108.476	.331	.399	8.537
	EW				.246	.284	6.086

** Significance level p < 0.01.

In order to check mediation effect, four steps are applied according to Barron and Kenny's (1986). The first step indicates that the model is significant because of beta coefficient t-value= 12.844, R square= .293, and standardized coefficient beta= .541. The R square value states that approximately 29% variation in criterion is caused by predictor and standardized beta coefficient value explains 54% contribution of this model. For second mediation step, beta coefficient t-value is 11.597, standardized beta coefficient value is .503, and R square is .253. As far as third step is concerned, regression equation shows beta coefficient t-value= 11.046, standardized coefficient beta= .484, and R square .235. The R square value explains 23% contribution of the model. The fourth step results seem to indicate that beta coefficient t-value CT with RI is significant which is 8.537. Further, beta coefficient t-value of EW with RI is also significant that is 6.086.

This clearly illustrates that mediation exists but partial mediation because t-value of CT with RI and EW with RI both are significance.

Steps	IV	DV	\mathbf{R}^2	F Stat	В	Beta	t value
Step 1	PQ	RI	.214	108.181	.433	.462	10.401
Step 2	PQ	EW	.234	121.500	.523	.484	11.023
Step 3	EW	RI	.235	122.024	.419	.484	11.046
Step 4	PQ	RI	.303	86.098	.279	.298	6.216
	EW				.294	.340	7.110

Table 14: Regression Analysis of Product Quality and Electronic WoM on Referral Intention

** Significance level p < 0.01

According to Barron and Kenny's (1986), four steps are used to check the mediation effect: the first step shows that the model is significant because the beta coefficient t-value = 10.401, R square =.214, and standardized coefficient beta =.462. The R square value indicates that the predictor is responsible for about 21% of the variation in the criterion, and the standardized beta coefficient value explains 46% of this model's contribution.

The second mediation step shows that the beta coefficient t-value is 11.023, standardized beta coefficient value is.484, and R square is.234. The regression equation for the third step shows that the beta coefficient t-value = 11.046, standardized coefficient beta =.484, and R square =.235. The R square value explains 23% contribution of the model. The fourth step results seem to indicate that beta coefficient t-value PQ with RI is significant which is 6.216. Further, beta coefficient t-value of EW with RI is also significant that is 7.110.

This clearly illustrates that mediation exists but partial mediation because t-value of PQ with RI and EW with RI both are significance.

Summary

Table 15: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

No.	Hypotheses	Results
H1	PV has a positive significant effect on the formation of	Accepted
	EWOM.	
H2	SQ has positive significant effects on the formation of	Accepted
	EWOM.	
H3	CT has a positive significant effect on the formation of	Accepted
	EWOM.	
H4	PQ has a positive significant effect on the formation of	Accepted
	EWOM.	
H5	PV has a positive significant effect on the formation of RI.	Accepted
H6	SQ has a positive significant effect on the formation of RI.	Accepted
H7	CT has a positive significant effect on the formation of RI.	Accepted
H8	PQ has a positive significant effect on the formation of RI.	Accepted
H9	EWOM has a positive significant effect on RI.	Accepted
H10	EWOM mediates the relationship between PV and RI.	Accepted
H11	EWOM mediates the relationship between SQ and RI.	Accepted

H12	EWOM mediates the relationship between CT and RI.	Accepted
H13	EWOM mediates the relationship between PQ and RI.	Accepted

Conclusion and Recommendation

This part briefs the findings, implications for practitioners, limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies. Lastly conclusions of the study have been discussed in the following form.

Discussions of the Findings

The purpose of this study is to probe the effect of authoritative aspects on electronic WoM and on referral intention; along with-it contemplation of electronic WoM between authoritative factors and referral intention.

Existing studies have manifested that perceived value is one of the determinants to comprehend WoM (Hartline and Jones, 1996; Gruen at el. 2006; Keiningham at el 2007). The results of these studies reveal a positive and significant effect on electronic WoM (H1). The conclusion of this study is consistent with precursory studies (Nikookar et al., 2015; Yasvari et al., 2012). Customer perceived value instructs a give and take between gains and losses (Monroe, 1990).

Foregoing studies prove that service quality is one of the determinants to ascertain WoM (Bloemer et al., 1999). The outcomes of current research depict that service quality has positive and substantial impact on electronic WoM (H2). The consequence is steady with above research (Nikookar et al., 2015). Service quality is consumer differentiation between surmise of service with discernment of actual excellence (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Gronroos, 1984).

Preceding studies demonstrate that consumer trust is one of the determinants to verify the WoM (Waseem, Shabbir, & Imran, 2016). The outcomes of this research exhibit that consumer has positive and substantial impact on electronic WoM (H3). The result is consistent with antecedent research (Nikookar et al., 2015; Kim, Sung, & Kang, 2014). Consumer trust is cognitive state composing the intention to accept risk based on assumptions of the intentions or behavior of another person or organization (Rousseau et al, 1998).

Forgoing studies evince that product quality is one of the determinants to learn WoM (Basuroy et al., 2006; Kozinets et al, 2010). The outcomes of this research unveil that product quality has positive and substantial impact on electronic WoM (H4). The deduction is consistent with antecedent research (Nikookar et al., 2015). Product intended view point is focused on its reasonable source which differences of the elements or characteristics are attracted by the product are being examined as representing to the dissimilarities in quality (Garvin, 1984).

Preceding studies have shown that perceived value is one of the determinants of referral intention (McKee et al., 2006). The findings of this research reveal that perceived value has positive and substantial impact on referral intention (H5). The result is consistent with above research (Nikookar et al., 2015; Yasvari et al., 2012). Perceived value is realized as a potential indicator of behavioral intention (Kim J. H., 2014).

Several studies demonstrate that service quality is one of the predictors of referral intention (Bloemer et al., 1999; Swan & Oliver, 1989). The investigation of this research showed that service quality has positive and substantial impact on referral intention (H6). The outcome is fixed

with incident research (Nikookar et al., 2015). Service quality play vital role in generating consumer responses (Zeithaml et al, 1996).

Former studies evince that consumer trust is one of the determinants to ascertain referral intention (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1999; Verhoef, Franses, & Hoekstra, 2002; Chiou, 2004; Lien & Cao, 2014). The finding of this research shows that consumer trust has positive and substantial impact on referral intent (H7). The results are consistent with previous researches (Nikookar et al., 2015). The more intensely a person trusts on service provider, there is greater possibility of him to get convinced with association and likely to give referrals (Chiou, 2004).

Past studies established that product quality is one of the determinants to referral intention (Ward & Ostrom, 2003). The verdict of this study shows that consumer has positive and substantial impact on electronic WoM (H8). The results are homogenous with former studies (Nikookar et al., 2015). Product quality is strongly recognized when a customer has faith on organization (Gul, 2014).

Last studies demonstrate that WoM is one of the determinants to referral intention (Von Wangenheim & Bayon, 2007; Walsh & Elsner, 2012). The verdicts of this research produce evident that electronic WoM has positive and substantial impact on referral intention (H9). The conclusion is steady with antecedent studies (Nikookar et al., 2015). Majority of people is not valued much but people whose WoM lures the potential fresh client (Kumar, Petersen, & Leone, 2007).

Previous studies exhibit that WoM mediates between influential factors and referral intention (Nikookar et al., 2015). The study's conclusion is that the association between influential factors and referral intention is mediated by electronic WoM (H10, H11, H12, H13). The results are consistent unchanging with above studies (Nikookar et al., 2015).

Implications for Managerial Practitioner

The finding of this study has certain managerial implications on fast food industry Bahawalpur. Insight study reveals that electronic WoM plays a vital role in creating customer referrals. Therefore, first implication concludes. Managers can tackle the beast of electronic WoM by online presence of fast-food company through social media, blogs and emails. They can also develop feedback mechanism to handle customer complaints and suggestions. Further second implication also concludes. Managers can focus on factors which enhance electronic WoM in order to attain more customer referrals; otherwise, situation can be vice versa. In depth study concludes that consumer trust as influential factor has been largely ignored by fast food industry of Bahawalpur. Therefore, third implication concludes. Managers can build measure to overcome trust deficiency between fast food restaurants and consumers. Such measures can result as a game changer in already saturated market of fast-food Bahawalpur; otherwise vice versa situation can be unfortunate.

Implications for Academic Practitioners

The finding of this study has certain academic implications on marketing literature. Previous studies are conducted using traditional WoM within service context of Iran airlines. Therefore, first implication concluded. The current study has used electronic WoM instead of traditional WoM which is an addition to existing literature. Second implication can be concluded. The current research is conducted in goods and services both contexts; therefore, product quality is assessed as

an influential factor of electronic WoM which is a new addition to existing literature. Third implication can be concluded. The current study is first of its nature conducted in the context of Bahawalpur within fast food industry which is an addition to existing literature.

Limitations of Research

Following are the limitations for research:

- 1) In this study researcher limits the sample to college and university students, while not considering the other segments population.
- 2) In this study researcher uses some of the influential factors (perceived value, service quality, and consumer trust and product quality) which enhances electronic WoM and referral intention.
- 3) In this study researcher uses cross-sectional study.
- 4) In this study the researcher limits study within the fast-food industry; particularly within the context of Bahawalpur.
- 5) In this study researcher focuses on positive relationships formed among foresaid variables only.

Future Directions for Research

Following are the future directions for research:

- 1) Further studies with larger sample which covers all segments of population can be conducted.
- 2) Further studies can be conducted with inclusion of further influential factors which enhances electronic WoM and referral intention, such as Price.
- 3) Further studies can be conducted using longitudinal study.
- 4) Further studies can be conducted with other industry and in diverse cultural context either nationwide or another country.
- 5) Further studies can be conducted emphasizing negative relationship among foresaid variable or both positive and negative relationships can be determined.

Conclusion

The current study emphasizes the role of electronic WoM promulgated by dominant factors. It is one of the major spectrums of referral intention especially in fast food industry. Referral intention plays a vital role for enhancing performance of overall organization. If a customer is satisfied, he or she can more promptly refer other clients. Customer referral helps the managers to acquire new customers and substantial increase in sales.

The population of current research consists of fast-food users of Bahawalpur. This research uses convenience sampling technique. The sample consists of 400 respondents of college and university students of Bahawalpur. Self-conducted questionnaires are used to collect information.

After conducting this research, it is concluded that influential factors is an important indicator of how customers feel about fast-food industry. The results indicated consumer trust to be most promising influential factor propagating electronic WoM and referral intention but largely ignored by fast food restaurants managers of Bahawalpur. However, if it is tackled wisely, it can become a game changer in already saturated market. Also, the results of the mediation tests indicated that electronic WoM also has positive relationship with influential factors and referral intention. Therefore, it signifies the role of electronic WoM in prompting customer referral and becoming a bread winner source for Fast Food Company.

Appendix

Questionnaire

Gender	Male	Female			
Age	<20	20-30	31-40	[] Above 40
Marital Status	Single	Married			
Family	Nuclear	Joint			
Qualification	Metric/Inter.	Bachelors	Masters		MS/PhD
Monthly income	Dependent	15000-24999	25000-34999		>35000
Occupation	Professional	Businessman/women	Other		

Which fast food of Bahawalpur do you like, specify it.

1. Almaida 2. Chicken Cottage 3. Zanzibaar 4. Lataska 5. Burger Avenue 6. Other_____

Scale: <u>Strongly Agree (5) - Agree (4) - Neutral (3) - Disagree (2) - Strongly Disagree (1)</u>

Sr. No	Questions	Fo	r each st	atement o	circle a nur	nber
Please with re	Service Quality give your opinion about "Desired Fast Food" gard to the following statement. Tangibility	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Fast Food has comfortable and friendly environment.	5	4	3	2	1
2	Fast Food has clean environment.	5	4	3	2	1
3	Fast food has cleaned and comfortable sitting area.	5	4	3	2	1
	Responsiveness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	Fast food staff willing to respond to request of customer.	5	4	3	2	1
5	Fast food staff spends time with their customer in order to solve their problem.	5	4	3	2	1
6	Fast food staff responds quickly.	5	4	3	2	1
	Reliability	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7	Fast Food services are well organized.	5	4	3	2	1
8	Fast Food services are very reliable.	5	4	3	2	1
9	Fast Food services carried out right.	5	4	3	2	1
10	Fast Food restaurant keeps its promises.	5	4	3	2	1
	Assurance	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11	Knowledgeable and experienced staff.	5	4	3	2	1
12	Friendly and courteous staff.	5	4	3	2	1

13	Staff explains thoroughly hygienic condition.	5	4	3	2	1
	Empathy	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14	Staff understands specific needs of customers.	5	4	3	2	1
15	Staff shows sincere interest.	5	4	3	2	1
16	Staff looks for the best in customers' interests.	5	4	3	2	1
	Perceived value	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17	Compared to other fast food, this fast food charges better prices for the quality of the services provided	5	4	3	2	1
18	Fast food has reasonable prices in contrast to others	5	4	3	2	1
19	Fast food values its customer a lot in contrast to others	5	4	3	2	1
	Consumer Trust	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20	I can trust on this fast food brand.	5	4	3	2	1
21	I can rely on this fast food brand for continuous usage.	5	4	3	2	1
22	This is an honest fast food brand.	5	4	3	2	1
	Electronic WoM	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
23	I will speak positive words about this fast food to people on internet	5	4	3	2	1
24	I will refer this fast food when asked via internet (Facebook, Twitter, Email etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
25	I will encourage my friends and my relatives to use the services of this fast food via internet	5	4	3	2	1
	Referral Intention	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
26	If asked I will refer fast food to persons in my contact.	5	4	3	2	1
27	I will refer this fast food, if someone is interested in finding good hangout	5	4	3	2	1
28	I will prefer the services of this fast food in contrast to others.	5	4	3	2	1
	Product Quality					Strongly
	Perceived Quality	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree
29	Fast Food offers very good quality products	5	4	3	2	1
30	Fast Food offers products of consistent quality	5	4	3	2	1
31	Fast Food offers very reliable products	5	4	3	2	1

32	Fast Food offers products with excellent taste	5	4	3	2	1
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