

## The Mediating Role of Brand Reputation and Brand Equity in the Ghanaian Hospitality Industry

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### Abstract

*This study aims to examine the brand (equity) of local and global fast-food restaurants in Ghana. Furthermore, the analysis surveys the brand association (B Ass.) and brand awareness (B Aw.) dimensions of brand equity (BE). Also explored was brand reputation (BR) as a mediating factor between brand equity and brand trust (BT). Social media's moderating effects were also probe. The study employed partial least square "3.0" for inferential statistics and structural equation modeling. BE had a beneficial and significant impact on BR, according to the data. Another point of consideration was that the influence of brand awareness on brand trust is partially mediated by brand reputation; the relationship between brand association and brand trust is wholly mediated. The study outcomes help develop multidimensional psychosomatic processes entangled in buyer selection needs for fast food restaurants and the service industry in Ghana.*

**Keywords:** Brand Trust (BT), Brand Awareness (B Aw.), Social Media (SM), Brand Reputation (BR), Brand Equity (BE), and Brand Association (B Ass.).

### 1. Introduction

Building and maintaining a brand is critical in today's modest marketing environment and Brand Equity (BE). BE is defined as the organization's values or gains from planning and managing a specific brand of products or service to meet customers' expectations over time [56]. To support marketing strategies in addition to that consumers' (Cs) morals, the BE dimension should appropriately measure consumers' brand perceptions [28]. Moreover, it applies to clients, buyers, and users alone and to executives and marketing personnel who analyze the brand's routine and design persuasive schemes [46]. Accordingly, assessing BE offerings is an excellent way to look at both end-user brand insights and the marketing activities of a firm [32].

Vicissitudes in Cs, routines have increased the demand for a variety of dining experiences and rapid improvements in the hospitality industry's fast food and restaurant sectors [44]. Such progress has an impact on the outside of numerous local and intercontinental brands, which continue to build strong brands to strengthen keenness and BE, leading to Cs identifying themselves with specific restaurants [37]. [50] Proposes that free cafés and restaurants make an effort to provide varieties because the taste of Cs differs from locals or foreigners. The hospitality industry of Ghana was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in Africa, especially from a profitability point of view in the past four years [41]. In addition, research by [2] exhibited that the hospitality industry contributed more to the country's GDP than other sectors, as it accounted for 7.8% in 2015. Furthermore, the service sector, which the

hospitality industry is just a fraction of, accounted for 56.6% industrial growth of the country; reports stated that 28.4% of the population has internet access. Among them (e.g., 82.22% Facebook, 7.52% Twitter, 7.3% Pinterest, 1.8% are YouTube users). In developed countries like U.K.'s eating habits such as ordering fast food and family dependency on restaurants for diner continue to grow, with demand for customized packages and low price driving local food street producers to enjoy relatively growth in profits than well-known brands [10]. In 2014, the hospitality industry was value roughly to be (£ 16.4 billion), and forecasted be raged in (£ 22 billion) over the next ten years [22]. Even though some scholars have considered the progress of fast-food restaurants, there is an insufficient number of studies in the hospitality or tourism business that focus on Cs-based BE [37, 55]. The researchers' argument as to whether BE dimensions used in product marketing can be applied to service-based brands remains unconvincing because of the intangibility and heterogeneity of services. It is stated that products-based BE requires changes to meet the hospitality industry and service brand assessment [47].

Furthermore, while preceding studies have evaluated the association between Brand Reputation (BR) and Brand Trust (BT) [10, 50], fewer studies have detailed the influence of BR on Cs-based fast-food restaurants and the interplay between BE and BT in the Ghanaian hospitality industry. Scholars consider BT a vital driver in the hospitality sector due to food safety, taste, and hygiene concerns [3, 60]. Moreover, trust is a critical influencer for a customer to continuously explore a particular food brand, leading to brand equity [4]; therefore, the ability for a firm to build trust becomes the ground for brand equity.

The more consumers build trust in a specific fast-food brand, and it's equivalent to an indication that; hygiene, food safety, and another health component of the producer might be top-notch and reliable [19, 63]. Moreover, increasing hunger for the usage of the internet in the country has led to an internet penetration rate of 16.3%, with 33.6% of the population is using the internet [27]; the internet penetration has to enable fast-food firms to place their products on online platforms and receive the order from the consumer. This has made customers and producers' engagement a fantastic experience leading to the desired growth in the fast-food industry [39]. Cs aim to reduce uncertainty and doubt by considering the whole BE, BT, and BR. As a result, it is critical to look into the relationships between BE, BR, BT, and social media moderation in the restaurant business in advance.

## **2. Development of Conceptual Model and Hypothesis**

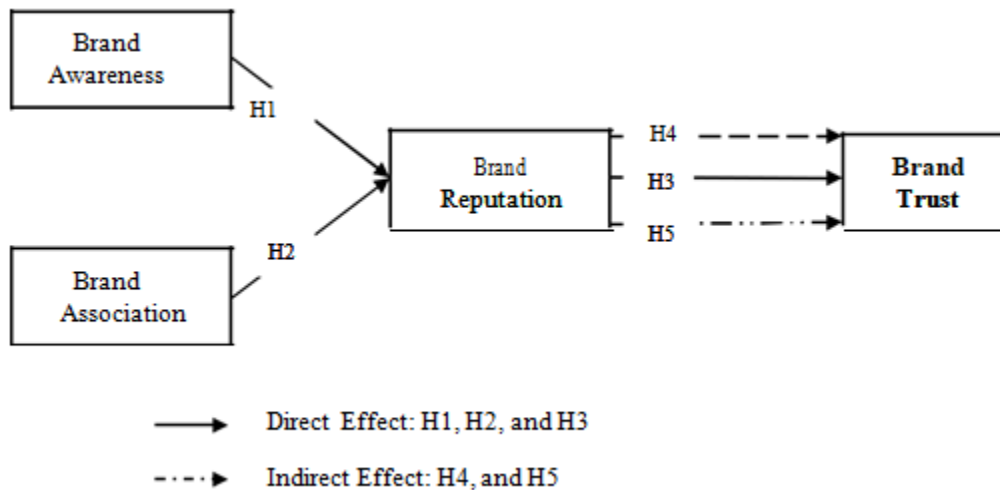
A significant amount of research is focused on identifying BE measures and establishing a common ground for future learning [9, 57]. [1] BE was divided into four categories: B Aw., B Ass., perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Scholars have explored standard features of service BE in light of the different elements of services. [37] Employed various methods to investigate the BE of luxury hotels and chain restaurants (e.g., B Aw., brand image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty). Using this as a foundation, [55] add food quality to the perceived quality metric in the context of a chain restaurant. We used B Aw. and B Ass., BE dimensions, to measure their studies in the current study.

The current schooling also contains BR and BT to determine a stronger link to other branding elements. Because it promotes consumers' associations with intangible properties such as flavor, trustworthy hygiene, environment, and so on, BT is one of the essential qualities of the chain restaurant brand. In the hotel industry, augmented BT reduces C's perceived risk when selecting a service [19]. In this regard, a brand's status is likewise a valued intangible asset

[16]. Given the subtle nature of the services and the difficulty of appraising their quality without having experienced them, reputation is critical in the hospitality business [26]. Scholars have confirmed that a good reputation appears to be a marker of reliability [60] and functions as a precursor to trust [4, 61]. [10] Investigated trust in mediating the relationship between corporate reputation and brand loyalty in the restaurant business, and the findings supported previous modifications that corporate reputation had an impact on confidence. Furthermore, the perceived BR was used as a mediator between brand extensions BE and perceived quality [31]. Consequently, BR is used as a mediating variable between BE and BT in this study.

## 2.1. Conceptual Framework

The study conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1. Brand awareness and brand association are used as independent variables, brand trust is used as a dependent variable, brand reputation is used as a mediator, and social media tools are used as a moderator in this study.



## 2.2. Development of Hypothesis

### 2.2.1. B Ass. effect on BR

[35] Defines BR as the other informative nodes in memory related to the brand node and contains the brand's significance for customers. The knots include details about a product or service, such as logos, labeling, price, and advertising of a particular brand, as well as favorable or bad word-of-mouth and the Cs previous experience [29]. According to [1], the foundation of BE is brand awareness, which can produce positive links for Cs. B Ass. is regarded as one of the most critical factors in developing a brand image [36]. A positive brand image leads to a positive brand reputation. The construction of a brand image defines a product/service position through advertisement, labeling, logo colors, letters, and symbols, and effectively standing strengthens a solid brand image [51]. [53] Mentioned that a brand's image is strengthened through a long-lasting memory impression. Escort is generally associated with a progressive reputation by Cs who are loyal to a brand [52]. Thus, the current research proposes that:

***H<sub>1</sub>: B Ass, has a positive and significant impact on BR.***

### 2.2.2. B Aw. influence on BR

Brand awareness is linked to the brand's strength in consumers' thoughts, and it allows customers to recognize and recall the brand, hence increasing brand equity [35]. Because "brand image and brand attitude" cannot be shaped in its absence [40], B Aw. is a critical goal of marketing efforts in specific firms. Some scholars have emphasized the importance of B Aw. in the service industry [34, 38]. It's linked to a brand name, and it reflects how likely it is that a specific brand name will come to C's mind [35]. A brand name reduces the chances of buying and using a different service brand [7]. B Aw. Donates to develop sincerity, which in turn grows honorable intentions, according to [43]. As a result, Cs' trust in a particular brand improves, and BR improves. B Aw. has been linked to BR, according to researchers [42]. Both aspects of brand equity (B Aw., and B Ass.) are depicted as essential parts of reputation [14, 45], and hoards in B Aw. can tip to a "sustainable competitive advantage and long-term brand worth" [40]. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed.

***H<sub>2</sub>: B Aw, has a positive and significant impact on BR.***

### **2.2.3. Influence of BR on BT**

Scholars agree that reputation and attitudes are linked [54]. Attitudes are a consumer's "feelings and ideas about a brand based on knowledge and information gathered from their experiences" [64]. Thus, a brand's reputation relates to consumers' perceptions of the brand as excellent and trustworthy [3]. [58] asserts that a positive reputation communicates a low level of risk and elicits purchase decisions. Scholars have concluded that trust reduces risk and uncertainty [11, 32]. In the service industry, consumer buying decisions are heavily influenced by trust [8]. When Cs believe in a brand, they believe the food is of good quality, eliminating concerns about hygiene and freshness [17]. Therefore, the researchers believe that trust is an essential factor in maintaining a positive relationship between Cs and earners because it has the power to reduce doubt and promote trust [58]. Because of the ambiguity of the services in the hospitality business, such as fast food and chain restaurants, reputation is increasingly influential [13, 49]. Researchers have confirmed that BR has a positive effect on BT [6, 61]. Accordingly, enhanced trust in the quality of services is transmitted through reputation [25]. Consequently, the current research proposes that:

***H<sub>3</sub>: BR has a positive and significant impact on BT.***

### **2.2.4. Brand Reputation Mediating Effects**

To investigate BR's partial and full mediation effects on the relation between BE dimensions and BT, we assess the direct impact of BE dimensions on BT. Scholars have looked into the relationship between BT and Cs-based BE [15, 57]. [37], for example, claims that humanizing service attributes is inextricably linked to BT refinement. Therefore, the faith in the brasserie brand is increased by increasing food safety requirements, food quality, and service capability in the eatery [8]. Furthermore, [43] discovered that B Ass. is the most critical factor in BT service branding. In addition, some researchers showed positive results using the BR as a mediator between BE dimensions and BT [25, 6]. [25] reported a positive partial mediation between B Aw. and BT, while they discovered a complete mediation between B Ass. and BT. Hence, the current research proposes that:

***H<sub>4</sub>: The relationship between B Aw., and BT is positively and significantly mediated by BR.***

***H<sub>5</sub>: The relationship between B Aw., and BT is positively and significantly mediated by BR.***

## **3. Methodology**

### 3.1. Sample and data collection

A pilot study conducted before the principal conduct of the survey. The primary survey was born in the country's biggest cities (e.g., Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, and Sunyani). Before beginning the study, respondents were asked if they had any previous experience with fast food establishments and brands. The field survey technique employed precisely a suitable random sample method. Thus,  $n = 369$  respondents represent the population of the country.

### 3.2. Measurements

A 7-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the constructs (variables), with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 7 indicating strong agreement. The use of three elements determined B Aw.. B Ass. was based on three things. Four items were used to assess BR. Five items were used to assess the BT construct. Previous studies [25, 6] were used to develop the items.

## 4. Results

Table 1 displays the results of the constructs' assessment. The coefficient value of CA should be more than 0.7, according to the rule of thumb established by [48]. The level of dependability will be exceptional. High dependability is defined as a value between 0.7 and 0.9. It will become moderate if it is between 0.5 and 0.7. And if it's less than 0.5, it'll be classified as low. Three constructs (B Aw. = 0.714, B Ass = 0.748, BR = 0.884, and BT = 0.841) have outstanding reliability values in the range of 0.7 to 0.9. Furthermore, about loading, [12] advocated that loadings should be bigger than 0.5. In addition, [5] said that the AVE value should be larger than 0.5. According to [21], composite construct reliability should be more than 0.7. As a result, the study's findings were judged to be satisfactory and meet the basic requirements defined by previous researchers, considering all of the thumb guidelines connected to reliability and validity standards.

**Table 1: Evolution of Measurement Model**

Construct	Items	Loading	CA	CR	AVE
<i>Brand awareness</i> (B Aw.)	B Aw1	0.781	<b>0.714</b>	<b>0.795</b>	<b>0.565</b>
	B Aw2	0.667			
	B Aw3	0.800			
<i>Brand association</i> (B Ass.)	B Ass1	0.874	<b>0.748</b>	<b>0.849</b>	<b>0.656</b>
	B Ass2	0.884			
	B Ass3	0.648			
<i>Brand reputation</i> (BR)	BR1	0.869	<b>0.884</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.741</b>
	BR2	0.839			

	BR3		0.875		
	BR4		0.861		
<i>Brand trust</i>	BT1	0.821	<b>0.841</b>	<b>0.888</b>	<b>0.614</b>
(BT)	BT2	0.659			
	BT3	0.758			
	BT4	0.856			
	BT5	0.809			

The variables' discriminant validity was assessed using two approaches. 1) The cross-loadings of indicators were made to be higher than any other opposing structures [24]. 2) The square root of AVE for each construct should exceed the inter-correlations of the construct with other model constructs, according to the [20] criterion (Table 2). As a result, both procedures ensured that the results were satisfactory and that they were genuine.

**Table 2: Coefficients of Discriminant Validity**

	B Ass.	B Aw.	BR	BT
<i>B Ass.</i>	<b>0.810*</b>			
<i>B Aw.</i>	0.803	<b>0.752*</b>		
<i>BR</i>	0.644	0.734	<b>0.861*</b>	
<i>BT</i>	0.556	0.675	0.733	<b>0.784*</b>

**Note:** \* Bold values represent the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE).

**Table 3: Hypothesis Testing and Path Coefficients**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
<b>Direct Effect</b>						
	B Ass. -> BR	0.136	0.066	2.053	0.041	Supported
	B Aw. -> BR	0.623	0.060	10.365	0.000	Supported
	BR -> BT	0.560	0.031	18.090	0.000	Supported
<b>Indirect Effect</b>						

B Ass. -> BR -> BT	0.076	0.036	2.103	0.036	Supported
B Aw. -> BR -> BT	0.349	0.044	7.938	0.000	Supported

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on BE, BR, and BT. Initially, this work focused on the aspects of BE that are important/critical to the hospitality and tourism industries (Marriott, Hayat Residence, Domino's, Nandos', KFC, Pizza Hut, and McDonald's). This article states that both dimensions are considered to be the crucial elements of the BE. Even though various studies have been conducted against BE, this work in Ghana is fresh and requires further investigation. The results shown in **Table 3** indicate that both dimensions of the BE (e.g. B Aw., B Ass.,) have optimistic effects on BR. In addition, BR has a strong influence on BT. Therefore, we confirm that BR plays a mediating role between the BE and BT dimensions.

More precisely, we have built six hypotheses. Among them, four are direct, and the rest indirect, as exhibited in **Fig. 1** and **Table 3**. All the hypotheses found are positive and significant; the decision was justified because the  $t$ -value was greater than two ( $t$ -value  $> 2$ ), and the  $p$ -value was less than 0.05 ( $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the results found are consistent with previous studies.  $H_1 = B$  Ass. has a positive and significant effect on BR. **Table 3** [Beta ( $\beta$ ) = 0.136, standard deviation (SD) = 0.066,  $t$ -value = 2.053,  $p$ -value = 0.041] shows the results. Previous research [53, 25] has found similar results.  $H_2 = B$  Aw. influences BR in a positive and significant way. **Table 3** shows the results (Beta = 0.623, SD = 0.060,  $t$ -value = 10.365,  $p$ -value = 0.000). [25, 43] reported similar results.  $H_3 = BR$  has positive and significant influences on BT. The results (Beta = 0.560, standard deviation = 0.031,  $t$ -value = 18.090,  $p$ -value = 0.000) are shown in **Table 3**. Results are in similitude with previous studies of [6, 60, and 61]. Hypotheses 4 and 5 were established in favor of BR's mediating influence on BT, with  $t$ -values of 2.103 and 7.938  $> 2$  and  $p$ -values of 0.036 and 0.000  $< 0.05$ , respectively. The results obtained are supported by preceding investigations [25, 6]. To summarize, it is critical to comprehend the motivation for a stopover and progress BE dimensions based on the visit's goals in the hospitality business to strengthen the reputation and trust of service providers. However, executives should regularly assess if Cs is content with the restaurant and make changes based on societal preferences and target Cs preferences.

## 6. Limitation and Future Direction

This research was carried out in Ghana. In addition, it was only conducted in the hotel industry and focused on major brands (McDonald's, KFC, and Pizza Hut). A field survey technique was used. Only large cities were included. Furthermore, only two elements of brand equity were taken into account. As a result, future research should have other aspects of brand equity (e.g., brand affect, self-congruence, food and service quality). This research can also be used in different industries or areas. This research could be used to investigate further the impact of brand equity on brand performance, brand loyalty, and firm performance. It is also necessary to look into the interaction effect of social media on branding. Marketing executives must concentrate on the quality of the food and services, the environment, the grooming of the employees, and the usage of languages, as these factors contribute to the brand's and restaurant's trust and reputation [30].

Moreover, high quality, successful advertising, service excellence, emotional memories, identity creation, self-expression, and socialization can elicit emotional attachment, according to [23]. Therefore, marketers should consider how to activate Cs' sensitive attitudes based on their demographics (e.g., age, gender, and education) and other factors like trust, goals, and the surroundings. For example, the ambiance of service-oriented businesses (e.g., lighting, color, layouts, and music) must be examined following Cs symbolic requirements.

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