RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND AWARENESS STRATEGY AND WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION IN THE FAST-FOOD BUSINESS

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Abstract

The present study aimed to clarify the relationship between brand awareness and word-of-mouth (WOM) communication in the fast-food sector, Lambayeque Region, 2023. By adopting a quantitative approach, statistical tools were utilized to measure variables and address hypotheses and objectives. The study was correlational in nature, as it demonstrated the relationship between brand awareness and WOM communication. It was also applied in scope, disseminating learning based on the research that will assist the studied area. Furthermore, this study employed a nonexperimental, cross-sectional design because the variables were only analyzed in the workplace environment at a single point in time and were not manipulated. According to the results, it is evident that consumers will easily recall their favorite brands, provided these brands meet their expectations and are deemed significant, and the information on social networks is updated, detailed, useful, and valuable (Rubalcava de León et al., 2019). Moreover, they are likely to recommend them if they recognize and have a positive valuation of the brand, sharing favorable information about it on their social networks and with their peers (Luo et al., 2019). The study concludes that virtual interactivity and the quality of information are linked to the generation of brand awareness, which in turn was shown to be a predictor of electronic WOM (eWOM).

Keywords: Marketing, Food, Media, Brand Awareness, Word-of-Mouth, Social Networks, E-Commerce, Fast Food

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1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, technology is a fundamental part of society because it provides highly useful means, primarily for communication. Most people have access to various devices that allow them to engage in the digital world, where they are active users of social networks. Consequently, organizations see this as an opportunity to promote their products, services, or brand through various marketing strategies. These strategies facilitate interaction between the client and the company and enable a more precise understanding of consumer behavior (Maria et al., 2019).

It is important to highlight that consumers play a significant role in measuring the competitiveness of organizations. As consumers become increasingly demanding regarding products and services, they consider various factors before choosing a brand or purchasing a product. Based on their experiences, brand awareness is formed, representing how the brand is identified or remembered by its users and thus shapes its reputation through word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, which can positively influence corporate development. This becomes a crucial element in business management, as it is employed to attract potential customers (Jaakkola & Aarika-Stenroos, 2019).

In 2024, HubSpot's State of Marketing 2024 study, based on a survey of 250 marketers in Spanish companies, reveals a strong inclination on the part of companies to use social media as the main channel for attracting new customers. According to the data, 48.4% of the companies surveyed identify social media ads as the most effective channel for attracting potential customers, surpassing other traditional media such as television advertising or direct response ads ("El 48,4% de las empresas españolas", 2024). Today, social networks are highly useful for both organizations and their users, as they allow companies to position themselves in consumers' minds and consumers to share their experiences with goods or services. Thus, WOM is beneficial because it is capable of persuading consumers, creating purchase intentions, and earning brand loyalty (Santarriaga Pineda & Soto Ramírez, 2019).

According to a survey by the Global Web Index, various Asian countries are active on social networks and the web statistics show that 79.7% of Indonesia's population is an active user of these communication tools, followed by the Philippines, Malaysia, and China, with 78%, 72%, and 67%, respectively. This finding suggests that digital platforms enhance brand awareness among users and bolster commercial growth, as these technological media influence people's emotions and can lead to consumer preference for a particular brand, strengthening WOM (Chankoson & Thabhiranrak, 2019, p. 131).

In recent years, e-commerce in Peru has steadily but slowly increased. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers relied more on online shopping to meet various needs, positively impacting businesses and encouraging new online business ventures in the country ("¿Qué retos y oportunidades", 2020). Peru grew by 30% in e-commerce, reaching an online consumption volume of US $12.1MM (twelve thousand one hundred million), which represents only 3% of the total e-commerce market for Latin America of US $399MM (according to America Market Intelligence — AMI), and this growth potential compared to other countries makes Peru an attractive market (Cámara Peruana de Comercio Electrónico [CAPECE], 2023).

In Peru, studies specifically examining the relationship between brand awareness strategies and WOM communication in the local fast-food sector are scarce. Most of the existing research has focused on larger markets or international chains, leaving a gap in knowledge about how these dynamics work in the unique context of the Peruvian fast-food market.

This study primarily seeks to gather significant information to measure brand awareness and WOM communication in the fast-food sector in the Lambayeque region, which can aid future research. In countries such as the United States (US) and Germany, the instrument proposed by Rubalcava de León et al. (2019) was used for research, proving highly useful in demonstrating what was happening in the Peruvian context. This highlights the importance of investigating the topic, considering that much information about a brand, good, or service can be conveyed through social networks, with users always attentive to these networks.

The fast-food sector in the Lambayeque region is becoming increasingly competitive, referring to commercial establishments where food is prepared quickly for consumption on-site or to-go. A study conducted in Lambayeque found that the KFC brand is notorious in the minds of Chiclayo consumers (average value of 3.7), and is consolidated as the most remembered and preferred fast food brand by consumers and as one of the brands that dominate the Peruvian fast food market (Estela Niquen & Fernandez Lopez, 2019). Currently, there is no knowledge about the importance of brand recognition for Chiclayo consumers, about their ability to recall a brand, or about whether this recognition can positively affect the brand through opinions and recommendations on their web pages.

Thus, the following research question is posed:

RQ: How do brand awareness strategies implemented by fast-food companies in Peru influence the generation and propagation of word-of-mouth communication among local consumers?

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on brand awareness, its determinants, and WOM communication, culminating in the development of our hypotheses. Section 3 details the research methodology, including the sampling procedure, data collection instruments, and statistical analysis techniques employed. Section 4 presents the results of our empirical study, including descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Section 5 discusses the findings in light of previous research and their implications for theory and practice. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper by summarizing the key findings, acknowledging limitations, and suggesting directions for future research in the field of brand awareness and WOM communication in the fast-food sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Delafrooz et al. (2019) have conducted studies to identify how users shape their behaviors and attitudes toward a specific brand, as well as their appreciation for the quality of the brand relationship, the frequency of Instagram use, and the number of brands followed. The results revealed

that information exchange, brand attitude, quality of the relationship with the brand, and use of this social network significantly influence WOM on this platform. Similarly, Khalid et al. (2020) asserted in their research that online user opinions are a decisive factor for others' references about a specific brand, influencing whether other users decide to purchase or use any good or service. Consequently, Rubalcava de León et al. (2019) specified the determinants of brand awareness, and how these factors intervene in electronic WOM (eWOM), as well as their participation in it. The results will allow organizations to identify essential elements that will help them attract new customers and build loyalty. Likewise, Chankoson and Thabhiranrak, (2019) found a moderating effect of brand awareness between emotional attachment and WOM. Their research also highlights the importance of digital platforms in creating brand awareness, emotional attachment, and other elements that impact positive WOM. Similarly, Maria et al. (2019) infer that social network marketing and effective advertising generate satisfactory effects on brand awareness and purchasing decisions. Shamsudin et al. (2020) argue that brand associations are relevant to customers, as they believe that, with a significant number of products on the market, each brand represents a superior or similar quality among them, so the association allows the buyer to more easily recognize the good or service that meets their expectations.

Regarding theoretical foundations, it is important to define how brand awareness differs from brand experience and brand value to better understand the former. Brand awareness represents how customers can remember a brand, feel a connection with it, and choose it over others, thereby also increasing confidence in products or services and minimizing consumer vulnerability to competition, as the characteristics of goods are stored in buyers' memories and guide their behavior (Cardoso et al., 2022). Brand experience is briefly defined by Malarvizhi et al. (2022) as any feeling that a person or individual has from the moment of contact or approach with the brand, adding that this can be stimulated through packaging design, product quality, or even personal or online service. Brand value can be measured through brand awareness, brand attributes, and the reasons that drive brand acquisition.

The brand awareness variable refers to how a customer identifies a specific brand and the ability to differentiate it in the diverse market in which it is presented, which can affect the profitability of the organization. If customers do not have a good memory of the brand, they are unlikely to buy it again and may also share their dissatisfaction with other buyers both on social networks and physically (Cardoso et al., 2022). Moreover, it is important that recommendations be positive, especially those given online, as these recommendations have gained strength in recent years with increased technology use. For many people, it is easier to learn about a brand through social media (Cardoso et al., 2022). Additionally, Harwani and Sakinah (2020) refer to this concept as the way buyers determine a brand through various alternatives and how memory is able to recognize it, despite several decision-making options, as they can associate it with its packaging, colors, logo, or some significant characteristic without the inconvenience of determining a particular brand in their mind.

Advertising plays an important role in the process of brand awareness, as it helps customers take the first step toward purchasing a product through effective strategies (Foroudi et al., 2018). This process represents an essential element for every brand, considering that initially, the buyer is "risking" in acquiring a new product, and the brand faces the challenge of finally making them feel so secure and confident about the item that they end up becoming loyal, allowing the good position achieved in their mind to be observed.

Once this is achieved, they are unlikely to be attracted by the competition, thus demonstrating the importance of brand awareness and making it necessary to create strategies that improve this aspect (Zollo et al., 2020).

Recent studies have further illuminated the relationship between brand awareness and WOM communication in the digital age. Dwivedi et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive review of social media marketing, highlighting how brand awareness strategies on these platforms significantly impact consumer engagement and WOM behavior. Their findings suggest that interactive and personalized content on social media enhances brand recall and recognition, leading to increased positive WOM.

In addition, other studies have provided new insights into the relationship between brand awareness and WOM communication in the digital era, especially in the context of the food industry. Tran and Strutton (2020) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of factors influencing eWOM in social networks. Their findings highlight the important role of brand awareness in driving eWOM participation, suggesting that consumers are more likely to share information about brands they recognize and trust.

Regarding the determinants of the brand, Sun et al. (2020) state that for any organization, it is important to consider how to generate brand awareness and the factors to consider to achieve it, as there is a need to create bidirectional communication, which can be carried out through social networks and the media associated with them, thus allowing valuable information exchange between them (Paramita et al., 2021). In other words, these users join together to make changes they like, which helps create a bond between the consumer and the brand (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019). In this sense, it is deduced that elements such as the bond between the brand and the customer, the agility with which their problems are solved, timely information, and the rapid exchange of this information influence this determinant (He & Calder, 2020). Indeed, Gupta et al. (2020) summarize that brand awareness largely depends on the approach that it manages to have through the web with its users, which also brings multiple benefits, as it allows improving its competitiveness in the market and demonstrating the value given to its customers. Therefore, social networks can increase knowledge about a specific brand, as well as active participation between the company and the consumer through virtual environments that encourage users' purchasing decisions (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). Therefore, the following was proposed:

H1: The virtual interactivity of social network pages positively and significantly affects brand awareness.

It should be noted that the quality of the content published is another important element, as it influences users' perceptions and can manifest

differently in them, allowing customers to easily obtain and share information and intervening in the behavior they may have with the brand (Sun et al., 2020). This makes the buyer a significant factor for the brand to be successful and recognized and prepared to survive in the broad and fierce business market (Ökten et al., 2019). The information used in published content must be as accurate as possible so that it can be useful to the consumer. This will also help create a brand image, aiming to improve the interaction between both and focus on the public's needs (Marques et al., 2020). Sarker et al. (2021) argued that content should be easy to understand, with the aim of making the customer experience pleasant, as this strengthens their familiarity with the brand. Therefore, it is important to highlight that the quality of the information provided is essential, as its interpretation will achieve an optimization in brand awareness (Chen & Yuan, 2020). This leads to the following proposal:

H2: The quality of the information on the social network pages of brands followed by users positively and significantly affects brand awareness.

On the other hand, the WOM communication variable represents two different scenarios: one before the purchase and another after the purchase. Both scenarios share the experience they can provide to customers (Sahranavard et al., 2024). This can be defined as an important factor for information about the brand to be disseminated, which affects the reputation it may have in the market (Nisar et al., 2020). Indeed, Thiriot (2018) maintains that WOM is composed of people who are looking for information and those who transmit it, which can determine the failure or success of a brand in the market.

It should be mentioned that this type of communication can also occur virtually (eWOM), where the appreciation or valuation of a particular brand by consumers can be disseminated through virtual environments, which plays an important role in purchase intentions. Depending on users' opinions, others determine whether to buy the product (Iyer & Griffin, 2021). In this sense, Donthu et al. (2021) argue that the increase in technology has significantly influenced marketing, as digital platforms allow for a closer approach to consumers, and they can express their point of view on a product or service, which is part of eWOM.

This can be reflected in social networks through interactions such as positive or negative comments, ratings, likes, and reviews, among others.

In relation to the above, the importance of social networks and customers is evident, as they are a fundamental part of the growth of brands and their positioning in the market since the comments or ratings given by users on social media influence the purchasing decisions of others. The need for organizations to be competitive increases with the expansion of the market, as new brands are introduced every day to be willing to win customers, which is the main reason why the opinions or valuations they may receive are relevant, in addition to maintaining a solid image that allows a bond that is definitive from the moment of the first purchase or first contact (Ramos Farroñán & Valle Palomino, 2020). Currently, more brands are joining the domain of social networks, considering that the virtual community allows them to connect with potential customers and disseminate information about their products and services, adding that user participation promotes brand awareness and loyalty (Santos et al., 2022). From this, the following was proposed:

H3: Brand awareness positively and significantly affects electronic word-of-mouth about fast food consumption brands present on social networks.

On the other hand, Zhou et al. (2021) affirm that eWOM is joined by the new trend of social network influencers, considering that these people have many followers on digital platforms and can considerably intervene in consumer behavior, which will depend on the positive or negative opinions they may disseminate. Indeed, it is necessary that better customer outreach strategies are applied, specifically on social networks and other media, as with the emergence of these platforms people can communicate more quickly, which facilitates online interaction with the different brands existing in the market, as well as using these sites to share their experiences (Yu et al., 2021). Additionally, it is worth noting that this variable is unidimensional for Rubalcava de León et al. (2019) and is measured through the following indicators: 1) having conversations with other people about the consumption brand, 2) issuing positive judgments about it, and 3) recommending its pages.

Figure 2. Conceptual model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted with a quantitative approach, as statistical tools were utilized to measure variables and address the hypotheses and objectives proposed (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018). Similarly, the level was correlational, as it demonstrated the relationship

between brand awareness and WOM (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). It was also applied in nature, as learning was disseminated based on inquiries, which will aid the studied area (Bernal, 2016). Furthermore, this study utilized a cross-sectional, nonexperimental design because the variables were only analyzed in their work environment at a single point in time and were not manipulated (Cabezas & Beltran, 2021).

Although a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach was used in this study, alternative methods could also be appropriate to investigate the relationship between brand awareness and WOM communication in the fast-food sector. One of them is the mixed method, which combines quantitative surveys with qualitative in-depth interviews or focus groups. This approach could provide richer insights into consumer perceptions and behaviors, offering a more nuanced understanding of how brand awareness influences WOM communication.

Another alternative method is a longitudinal study, which involves collecting data from the same participants over an extended period. This approach could reveal how brand awareness and WOM behaviors evolve over time, potentially uncovering causal relationships that are not evident in cross-sectional data.

3.1. Participants

The studied population consisted of 384 users of the social networks Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube from the Lambayeque region. These data were obtained using the formula for an infinite population. The information was collected during the first quarter of 2023. In this case, Chiclayo residents who met the following criteria were chosen: 1) were individuals who frequented or used social networks, 2) who were from brands in the fast-food sector, such as KFC, Bembos, Pizza Hut, Popeye's, or China WOK, and 3) who were 18 years of age or older. A nonprobabilistic, purposive sampling method was used for measurement.

All participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study were informed about the study's objective and the use of the information provided.

3.2. Instruments

Accordingly, the survey technique was applied using the questionnaire from Rubalcava de León et al. (2019) as a data collection instrument, which consisted of 13 questions. Of these, seven pertained to the determinants of brand awareness, three to the *brand awareness* variable, and three to the *eWOM* variable on a Likert scale where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 — "strongly agree". A pilot test was applied to quantify the degree of reliability, yielding results for the determinants of brand awareness and the *brand awareness* variable at 0.84 and for the *eWOM* variable at 0.82.

3.3. Procedures

The data were collected virtually and in person (invitations were sent via email and social networks such as WhatsApp and Facebook), explaining the purpose of the study and the methodology to be used, as well as the fact that their information would only be used for academic purposes.

3.4. Statistical analysis

For data processing, the statistical programs SPSS v.25 and Excel v.2016 were used, which yielded reliability values of 0.76 for brand determinants, 0.84 for *brand awareness*, and 0.85 for *eWOM*. Subsequently, descriptive results were presented, and the relationships between variables were tested using Spearman's rho test.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive analysis

The sample was composed of men (48%) and women (52%), with the majority being teenagers and young adults (54%) and holding university degrees (59%). Furthermore, they reported using Facebook as their most common social network (79%) and spending two to four hours on it (40%), as shown in Table 1.

Additionally, in the descriptive analysis (Table 2), it was determined that, regarding *brand awareness* as a variable, an average medium level was identified. This finding indicates that consumers are capable of recalling a particular brand without any difficulty, thus facilitating their purchasing decisions. These findings suggest that these individuals can recognize their preferred brand under various conditions, even when presented with other choices.

However, it is worth mentioning that it is crucial for organizations to improve their marketing strategies to achieve a higher average concerning this variable. Regarding virtual inter-activity, a lower average rating was observed, highlighting as a main feature of the brands that they value their customers. It is also demonstrated that virtual interaction is of quality, considering that users have significant experience with the brand when interacting with its page, thus creating a closer connection with it. On the other hand, the quality of the information received scores that rank this aspect highly, indicating its significant importance to the customer. This allows them to know more about the brands they follow in greater detail. Consequently, it is inferred that the buyer trusts the information provided by the brands on their networks to be credible, current, and relevant. Therefore, it is essential that the content published is useful for users, which in turn will allow the company to gain a competitive advantage.

Table 1. Sample distribution

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Males	184	48
	Women	200	52
	Total	**384**	**100**
Age range	18–30	205	54
	31–50	149	38
	50 and over	30	8
	Total	**384**	**100**
Level of education	Secondary	35	9
	Higher technical	42	11
	Higher university	225	59
	Postgraduate	82	21
	Total	**384**	**100**
Most used social network	Facebook	302	79
	Instagram	58	15
	Twitter	24	6
	Total	**384**	**100**
Average time per day of use of the most frequent social network	0–1 hour	67	18
	2–4 hours	155	40
	5–6 hours	78	20
	More than 6 hours	84	22
	Total	**384**	**100**

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Item	$\bar{X}$	DE	α	CR	AVE
EWOM			0.851	0.834	0.895
I talk to my friends about the consumer brands I follow on social media.	2.466	1.054			
I like to give positive feedback about my experience with the consumer brands I follow on social media.	2.172	0.769			
I recommend the pages of the consumer brands I follow on social networks to other people.	2.227	0.718			
Information quality			0.764	0.729	0.752
The information provided by the consumer pages of the brands I follow on social networks is up-to-date.	2.981	0.958			
The information provided by the consumer pages of the brands I follow on social networks is useful.	3.827	1.133			
The information provided by the consumer pages of the brands I follow on social networks is detailed.	3.877	0.861			
The information provided by the consumer pages of the brands I follow on social networks is valuable to me.	2.944	0.560			
Virtual interactivity			0.781	0.715	0.741
The consumer brands I follow on social media value me as an important customer.	2.889	1.041			
The consumer brands I follow on social media respond in a timely manner.	2.323	0.967			
The consumer brands I follow on social media are interested in meeting my needs as a customer.	2.185	0.855			
Brand awareness			0.863	0.829	0.873
The consumer brands I follow on social media are important to me.	2.240	0.900			
It is easy for me to remember the consumer brands I follow on social media compared to other brands that do not use social media.	2.789	0.861			
I keep in mind those consumer brands that use social media.	2.875	1.032			

Note: AVE — average variance extracted, $\bar{X}$ — represents the mean or average value of a data set, DE — direct effect (used in path analysis or SEM) or data envelope (in efficiency analysis), CR — composite reliability.

Finally, regarding *eWOM*, the average values generally indicate that people talk with their friends about their experiences with the brands they consume and about which they have access through their social networks. Additionally, people express the pleasant experiences they obtained or whether these experiences met their expectations. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to strive to optimize their market participation and deliver products in a timely manner without losing quality, as WOM greatly influences consumers.

Subsequently, the validation and reliability analysis of the scale used were conducted. The reliability of the model was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α), which was found to be greater than 0.7 (Cronbach, 1970). Composite reliability (CR) was also used, with values greater

than 0.7 (Werts et al., 1974), and the AVE values were above 0.5, as shown in Table 2.

Furthermore, discriminant validity was verified, as the constructs considered in the study do not measure equivalent factors but are independent of each other. To verify this validity, the square root of the AVE was used, ensuring that it is higher than the correlation between this construct and others (Chin, 1988). As shown in Table 3, which shows the correlation coefficients between constructs, the diagonal displays the values of the square root of the AVE instead of the usual "1" values. According to Bagozzi (1994), the correlations between the different constructs of the model should be less than 0.8, which is the case here, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	Quality of information	Brand awareness	Virtual interactivity	eWOM
Quality of information	0.752			
Brand awareness	0.428	0.873		
Virtual interactivity	0.626	0.407	0.741	
eWOM	0.344	0.338	0.369	0.895

4.2. Regression analysis of the model

The multiple regression model was tested with SPSS v. 25 to determine the relationships between the constructs and test the hypotheses raised. The results are shown in Table 4.

Both Model 1 and Model 2 were found to be significant in explaining the relationships among the constructs. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) for Model 1 showed an F-statistic of 14.052 with a p-value of 0.000, and Model 2 had an F-statistic of

F = 17.677 with a p-value = 0.000. This finding establishes that the relationship between the constructs of the model is appropriate. Additionally, the residuals were examined to verify compliance with the assumptions of the regression model. The assumption of normality was met, as evidenced by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (p = 0.015), the assumption of ($r_1 = 0.423$ and $r_2 = 0.327$), and the degree of explanation in the model ($r_1^2 = 0.179$ and $r_2^2 = 0.107$).

Table 4. Discriminant validity

Model	R	R^2	R^2 adjusted	Std. error	F	Sig.
1	0.423	0.179	0.172	8.021	14.052	0.000[b]

Note: Predictor variables: brand awareness. Dependent variable: eWOM.

Furthermore, the data from Table 5 establish a significant relationship between *information quality* and *brand awareness* ($\beta = 0.576$), between *brand awareness* and *eWOM* ($\beta = 0.734$), and

between *virtual interactivity* and *brand awareness* ($\beta = 0.609$). This provided evidence to support hypotheses *H1*, *H2*, and *H3*.

Table 5. Relationships between model constructs

Relations	Standardized beta	Standard error	p-value	Decision
Virtual interactivity → brand awareness	0.609	0.116	0.001	Accept *H1*
Information quality → brand awareness	0.576	0.125	0.006	Accept *H2*
Brand awareness → eWOM	0.734	0.107	0.000	Accept *H3*

5. DISCUSSION

The study tested the existence of a relationship between the determinants (*virtual interactivity* and *information quality*) and *brand awareness*, which implies that consumers will easily remember their favorite brands, provided that these brands meet their expectations (Shamsudin et al., 2020), are given importance, and the information on social networks is updated, detailed, useful, and valuable. This finding is consistent with the results of Khalid et al. (2020), who indicate that consumer testimonials about specific brands can either encourage or limit their purchase. Moreover, this study relates to the findings of Maria et al. (2019), who determined the significance of digital platforms and social media marketing in generating substantial effects on brand awareness.

A significant relationship was also found between *brand awareness* and *eWOM*, suggesting that customers recommend their favorite brands as long as they recognize them (Shamsudin et al., 2020) and have a positive evaluation of them, sharing positive information about them on their social networks and with others in their environment (Rubalcava de León et al., 2019).

Similarly, this study expands the understanding of how digital marketing components directly influence consumer perception and decisions. This finding corroborates the thesis that increased brand awareness, fostered through virtual interactivity and quality of information, drives eWOM. In other words, when consumers are well-informed and feel a connection with the brand, they are more likely to actively recommend it.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of consumer experiences with brands in the digital realm. In a context where digital platforms have become primary channels of communication and marketing, the ability of a fast-food brand to maintain an updated, interactive, and valuable online presence is crucial for its success. This focus on the quality of information not only enhances brand awareness but also serves as a catalyst for remote communication.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the data obtained from the research, consumers exhibit moderate recognition of brands, engage in valuable virtual interactions with them, and trust the information provided by these brands. They share their experiences with the brands, influencing others' decisions. The correlation between brand recognition and valuation is significant and positive, indicating that consumers tend to recommend brands that they recognize and value. To improve, brands should intensify their marketing strategies, maintain the quality of their virtual interactions, continue providing useful information, and create positive consumer experiences.

Consequently, the research contributes to precisely demonstrating the relationship between brand awareness on social networks and WOM communication in the fast-food sector of the Lambayeque region. Considering that there are no previous studies in this locality, it is estimated that the present research could represent a starting point for future investigations. It provides timely knowledge to researchers, organizations, and the general

public, significantly promoting decision-making at the business level across various sectors and assigning important value to customers for the growth of any company. It should be noted that, through the results of this study, entrepreneurs will be able to devise strategies to build customer loyalty and encourage recommendations, in addition to increasing their competitiveness and improving their market position.

Furthermore, the research methodology, combining quantitative analysis with a focus on social media interactions, sets a precedent for future studies in the field. Researchers can build upon this approach, perhaps incorporating more advanced data analytics or expanding the scope to include other digital platforms, to further explore the nuances of online brand awareness and eWOM.

On the other side, the findings regarding the impact of virtual interactivity and information quality on brand awareness open up new avenues for research. Future studies could delve deeper into these factors, perhaps examining how different types of interactive content or varying levels of information quality affect brand awareness and subsequent WOM behavior. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The research was conducted in a specific geographical area and focused on a particular sector, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or industries. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study provides a snapshot of the relationships between variables at a single point in time, potentially missing longer-term trends or causal relationships that could be revealed through longitudinal research.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias or recall errors. Future research could benefit from incorporating observational data or actual behavioral metrics from social media platforms to complement self-reported measures.

Despite these limitations, the conclusions drawn from this study have significant implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, our findings contribute to the growing body of literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior, particularly in emerging markets. The strong relationship found between brand awareness and eWOM underscores the importance of digital presence for brand building and customer engagement in the modern marketplace.

From a practical standpoint, the results provide valuable insights for fast-food companies operating in the Lambayeque region and potentially in similar markets. The significant impact of virtual interactivity on brand awareness suggests that companies should prioritize engaging, interactive content on their social media platforms. Similarly, the importance of information quality highlights the need for brands to ensure that the content they share is not only engaging but also accurate, relevant, and valuable to their audience.

Furthermore, the study's findings on the relationship between brand awareness and WOM communication offer strategic implications for marketing managers. By focusing on building strong brand awareness through digital channels, companies can potentially amplify their marketing efforts through increased positive WOM from consumers. This organic form of marketing can be particularly powerful in the age of social media, where a single positive recommendation can reach a wide network of potential customers.

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