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EFFECTS OF THE MODERATING ROLE OF TRENDINESS ON BRAND IMAGE, E-WOM, BRAND ATTITUDE AND ONLINE PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract. *Purpose* – The purpose of the research is to analyse the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), brand image, and consumer attitude on purchase intention, as well as the moderating influence of trendiness on these relationships.

Research methodology – The study is quantitative research. Six hypotheses were put forward and tested in the research model. Survey data derived from a sample of 922 participants from Azerbaijan were examined using SPSS in order to evaluate the hypothesis.

Findings – According to the main findings, regression tests, it was determined that e-WOM, brand image and attitude towards the brand affect online purchasing intention. However, for the first time in this study, the moderator role of the trendiness variable, which was tested statistically, on the effect of e-WOM, brand image and attitude variables on online purchase intention was carried out. As a result of the analysis, although the moderator role of trendiness in the effect of e-WOM's online purchase intention and brand image on online purchase intention was found to be significant and positive, the moderator role of trendiness in the effect of attitude on online purchase intention was found to be insignificant.

Research limitations – The study exclusively covers Azerbaijan's fast-food service industry. Also, different people may have different ideas about fast food places, and the brand names in the questions may affect how people answer.

Practical implications – This study's scientific innovation is the first statistical test of the moderating role of the trendiness variable in the effects of e-WOM, brand image, and attitude on online purchase intention. Practical innovation is that data specific to the Azerbaijani fast-food sector can be useful for practitioners in helping brand managers better understand consumer behaviour and develop trend-focused marketing strategies.

Originality/Value – This research makes a major addition to was proved for the first time in the literature that the trendiness variable affects the brand's images and e-WOM even if it does not affect the attitude-to-purchase orientation. In this study, trendiness was found to strengthen the relationships between e-WOM, consumer perceptions of brands, and intent to buy, which reveals a new relationship not found in the existing literature. However, fast-food consumption habits of Azerbaijani consumers were also determined by a large survey.

1. Introduction

Fast food consumption rises due to both macroeconomic variables like globalization, economic growth, cultural change, and population growth as well as microeconomic factors like rising personal incomes in the nation, time limitations, and pricing. As of late, fast food has

become trendy among the well-to-do, winning over both kids and adults. People's views regarding a brand are shaped by their experiences or suggestions, and they may choose to embrace or reject these attitudes (Foroudi, 2019). As brand knowledge helps customers evaluate products, attitudes toward the brand might have a favorable or negative impact on purchase intentions (Lee & Ganesh, 1999). Customers in emerging nations imitate Western consumers and lifestyles, buying the products they encounter via personal channels, such as Word of Mouth (WOM), blogs, and travel, or through mainstream media (Akturan & Bozbay, 2018). But, in terms of food, one crucial psychological aspect that might influence consumers' buying intentions is attitude toward eating (Ghoochani et al., 2018).

In the early 1990s, the fast-food industry had a sharp increase in popularity and saw significant worldwide expansion (Ahmed et al., 2023). Mass-produced food with a range of menu items intended for commercial resale is referred to as fast food. High-speed customer service at a reasonable cost is the fundamental tenet of fast food. Worldwide, fast food consumption is common as many people see it as a necessary daily need (Liew et al., 2021).

Maintaining consumer confidence and loyalty in the cutthroat fast food industry requires a solid online and offline brand image (Rahman, 2023). To succeed in the fast-food market, which is quite competitive, you need to have strong brand equity (Ole et al., 2025). Based on their study of the effects of casual marketing on customer loyalty and brand image from the viewpoint of global fast-food chains, Mobarak et al. (2022) concluded that there is a link between CrM and customer loyalty, with brand image mediating the relationship to some extent.

The term "fast-food" is defined by Ng et al. (2023) as a method of eating whereby food is prepared and served rapidly by specialized eateries. Its cheap cost is one of its distinguishing features. According to Singh et al. (2021), brand image refers to the way that consumers perceive a certain brand, including its values, personality, reputation, and significance, and how this affects customer satisfaction.

Based on data gathered from 499 customers in Kuwait, Musaiger (2014) evaluated gender disparities in Arab consumers regarding fast-food, health attitudes, and consumption patterns of fast food. In research by Saraniya and Kennedy (2015), 200 Sri Lankan consumers' perceptions about fast food were examined. In research by Shakeel (2015), information was gathered from 150 participants, and the primary variables influencing consumers' purchasing intentions in the fast-food industry were looked at. Hussain (2018) used data collected from 360 consumers who purchased fast food from three fast food chain restaurants to explore the link between sensory aspects and brand image and customer loyalty (KFC, Dominos and Metro). The company image, quality, brand identity, zoning reputation, value, and purchase intention of the well-known Japanese fast-food chain Mos Burger were studied in research by Liu and Liao (2019).

In a study conducted by Wendin and Undeland (2020) with data from 120 adult consumers, Swedish consumers' attitudes, and preferences towards seaweed as food were examined. The present state of consumer satisfaction and loyalty in the Azerbaijani fast-food business was investigated in this research by Budagova (2020). Liew et al. (2021) conducted an exploratory factor analysis involving 400 respondents in Malaysia, identifying seven principal factors influencing Generation Z's intention to purchase fast food: service quality, food value and

restaurant environment, food quality, price, promotional appeal, human cues, and health and marketing. In a study conducted in Vietnam based on data collected from 272 customers by Cuong (2020) in fast-food restaurants, the impact of consumer happiness, brand love, image, and loyalty were examined. A study by Pathan et al. (2021) examined the impact of internet marketing in consumer intentions to buy in the fast-food sector, based on data collected through a questionnaire adapted from 150 respondents in India.

Studies have also been conducted on the connection between dietary habits, energy intake, BMI, and the frequency of consuming fast-food. Namely, Jeffery and French (1998) found that there is a significant positive relationship between individuals who go to fast-food restaurants one or more times a week and BMI. Unsettlingly consistent recent evidence indicates that fast food and other industrially manufactured meals include chemicals that lead to childhood obesity and high cholesterol (Bowman et al., 2004).

Fast-food restaurant visits are rising even more quickly and eating out is getting more popular. In 1970, a quarter of all food expenses were spent on food purchased outside the house (Lin et al., 1999); In 1995 it accounted for 40% of total food expenditure, and in 1999 it reached a record 47.5% of total food expenditure (Clauson, 2000). Fast food is often characterized as being high in calorie density, low in fiber and micronutrients, and high in fat, sugar, and salt (Goyal & Singh, 2007). Along with all flours, fast food consumption is increasing all over the world. Fast food restaurants are also increasing in Azerbaijan. These include restaurants owned by international brands and local brands.

While the existing literature on the fast-food industry has extensively examined the relationship between consumer behavior, brand image, and purchase intention, it has mostly focused on general factors and direct effects (Foroudi, 2019; Lee & Ganesh, 1999). Studies on fast food consumption in the literature have comprehensively addressed many factors influencing consumer behavior. In addition to macroeconomic factors such as globalization, economic growth, cultural change, and population growth, microeconomic factors such as income growth, time constraints, and the impact of pricing have been emphasized (Foroudi, 2019; Ahmed et al., 2023). Furthermore, recommendations and personal experiences that shape consumers' brand perceptions are known to determine purchase intention (Lee & Ganesh, 1999). However, while most traditional studies focus on the direct effects of these factors, they have been limited in examining the effects of elements such as e-WOM that emerged with the influence of the digital age and especially trend perception on consumer behavior in terms of holistic and moderator effects (Akturan & Bozbay, 2018; Mobarak et al., 2022).

In the literature, Japan (Liu & Liao, 2019), Sri-Lanka (Rasanthika & Gunawardana, 2013; Saraniya & Kennedy, 2015), Bangladesh (Tabassum & Rahman, 2012), Kuwait (Musaiger, 2014), Lithuania (Tamuliene, 2015), Mexico (Núñez-Fernández et al., 2021), Sweden (Wendin & Undeland, 2020), Vietnam (Cuong, 2020), India (Pathan et al., 2021). One of the differences of this study from previous studies is the addition of trendiness variable along with e-WOM, brand image, attitude, online purchasing variables. However, although the existing studies in the literature are on consumers of different countries, this study focused on Azerbaijani consumers. This study aims to analyze the impact of brand image, consumer attitude, and e-WOM on intentions to buy, as well as the moderating influence of trendiness on these relationships. It should be noted that fast food brands basically keep their core products and

offer new and current products to consumers. The main focus of this study is to ascertain whether the presentation of products that are on the agenda and much talked about for the purchase of consumers affects the purchase intention.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

How dynamic and contextual variables, such as trendiness, emerge with the proliferation of digitalization and social platforms; little is known about how factors like e-WOM and brand image affect consumers' propensity to make a purchase. In this context, this study's statistical testing of trendiness's moderating role fills a significant void in the literature. For younger, more trend-conscious demographics, the influence of trend perception on purchase decisions becomes an increasingly important factor.

This study examines e-WOM, attitude, brand image, and trendiness as key factors influencing online purchase intention. The literature emphasizes that e-WOM is a powerful tool and plays an essential role in consumer purchasing decisions, especially in the digital age (Akturan & Bozbay, 2018). Consumers acquire knowledge about items or services via online reviews and experiential sharing, which in turn shapes purchase intention. Similarly, various studies have supported the critical role of attitude in determining consumer behavior, and those positive attitudes strengthen purchase intentions (Ghoochani et al., 2018; Lee & Ganesh, 1999). Brand image, otherwise, represents the perception of a brand in the eyes of consumers, and a strong brand image has a positive impact on consumer loyalty and purchase decisions (Mobarak et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021). This study focuses on analyzing the direct impacts of essential factors like e-WOM, attitude, and perception of the brand on intention to buy online, with the goal of addressing important gaps in the existing literature related to consumer behavior.

Another element that enhances the originality of the study and plays a critical role in defining the hypotheses is the trendiness variable. Trendiness refers to how receptive consumers are to innovation and fashion, whether they follow current trends, and can influence purchasing decisions, particularly in sectors that appeal to a young and dynamic consumer base, such as fast food (Foroudi, 2019). There are limited studies in the literature examining how trendiness functions as a moderator in the relationships between e-WOM, attitudes and brand image, and online purchase intentions. Therefore, investigating how trendiness modifies these effects offers an innovative contribution from both theoretical and practical perspectives. By examining whether characteristics related to trendiness have a stronger impact on intent to buy, the hypotheses seek to enhance our comprehension of online marketing and branding methods.

2.1. Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

Arndt (1967) characterized WOM as "oral interpersonal interaction between a recipient and a communicator perceived by the recipient as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, or service". According to Kotler et al. (2014), WOM advertising is the primary marketing strategy that can spread swiftly and inexpensively among consumers. Whether or not German and Turkish customers in Germany vary in terms of brand loyalty and WOM communication when

buying mobile phones was the question explored in research by Uslu et al. (2013b). In terms of loyalty and WOM behavior, the study found that ethnicity is a significant factor in mobile phone purchase decisions.

One of the most significant information sources now of purchase is WOM, or informal customer communication regarding specific goods or services.

According to Usiña-Báscones et al. (2024), WOM has emerged as one of the most successful strategies for new customer acquisition in a highly competitive market since consumer views are seen as reliable and directly influence consumption patterns. Loyalty to environmentally conscious brands acts as a go-between for environmental consciousness and WOM was investigated in the Phan et al. (2024) research. The study's findings showed that WOM and brand trust are mediated by green brand loyalty.

e-WOM has a positive effect on the brand attitude variable but no effect on the brand loyalty variable, according to study conducted among Generation Z to produce purchase intention in the fast-food restaurant business (Afandi & Marsasi, 2023). According to Yuswita and Maulidah's (2024) research of fast-food customers, the relationship between brand loyalty and social media marketing is greatly impacted by e-WOM.

The factors influencing WOM in locals' and tourists' preferences for restaurants and food they will visit were investigated by Catubig and Catubig (2024). The study's findings showed that when food quality and taste improve, so does WOM. As stated by Yu et al. (2024), eWOM in the food service industry is positively impacted by market popularity, restaurant ratings, transit circumstances, and commercial development. By concentrating on elements like interaction, amusement, customisation, e-WOM, and trendiness, Zahra's (2025) research investigated how social media marketing affected these characteristics. Interactivity, e-WOM, and trendiness positively influence consumer-brand engagement, thus improving brand recognition and image, as evidenced by the investigation of data from a survey of 116 respondents. In contrast, entertainment and personalization have no discernible impact on interaction. Cai et al. (2025) investigated how e-WOM, consumer green brand trust, and consumer green purchasing behavior were affected by the green marketing mix. Research utilizing data gathered from 990 fast-food consumers indicates that the marketing mix significantly enhances customer brand confidence in response to the increasing consumer demand for ecologically friendly products. e-WOM refers to any unofficial consumer interactions made possible by web-based technology regarding the characteristics or applications of certain items or services as well as the shops that offer them (Schmäh et al., 2017).

H1: *e-WOM positively influences online purchasing intentions*.

2.2. Brand image

Any name, term, sign, symbol, design, or other characteristic that distinguishes a seller's goods from those of other sellers is referred to as a brand (Aaker, 1991; Watkins, 2006). A brand, according to Aaker (1991), is an observable thing that makes a promise of value and is frequently the most valuable asset a company may own. Many scholars have proposed and assessed the sources of brand equity in various ways. Aaker (1991) argues that in order to quantify brand equity, one needs look at things like brand recognition, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty.

To accomplish product and brand management objectives, a strong brand must be built. Branding is the expression of an organization's or product's essential truth or value that sets it apart from rivals (Aaker, 1996). Another way to describe brand image is as what consumers think and feel about the company (Roy & Banerjee, 2007). Brand image, as defined by Uslu et al. (2013a), is the customer's perception of brand associations. Brand loyalty and satisfaction are associated with the concept of brand image. The impact of public views of corporate social responsibility on loyalty of banking products, as well as the mediating roles of satisfaction and trust, were investigated in the research by Uslu and Şengün (2021).

Customer-based brand value, according to Keller (1993), is "the differential influence that brand knowledge has on consumer responses to the marketing of a brand". As a result, brand image refers to how a consumer perceives a brand and is determined by the brand connections they have in their minds. A specific brand can provide better brand messages than a rival brand thanks to a strong brand image. As a result, the brand's reputation will have an impact on and affect the customer's behavior (Burmann et al., 2008). In essence, whatever knowledge a buyer may have about a brand qualifies as an image element (Bondesson, 2012).

Consumer decisions based on psychological considerations have an impact on business profits and, in turn, the financial markets (Huseynli, 2022a). For this reason, businesses try to create a good brand image in consumers. To lower their purchasing risk, consumers choose to acquire goods from well-known companies with a favorable brand reputation (Sallam, 2016). The study conducted by Ilmandani and Kusmayadi (2022) examined the influence of brand image and cost on buying chase choices for drive-thru restaurants. Veas-González et al. (2024) sought to ascertain if the link between Chilean consumers' pleasure and loyalty is moderated by the fast-food businesses' brand image. Based on information gathered from a sample of 1,000 fast-food customers, it was found that while brand image does not control the relationship between loyalty and satisfaction in fast-food consumption, customer satisfaction is influenced by the physical environment, product quality, and service quality.

H2: *Attitude positively influences online purchasing intention*.

2.3. Attitude

One of the key ideas that marketers employ to comprehend their target audience, according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1981), is attitude. A key element in purchasing behavior might be one's attitude about a good or service. Singh (2015) investigated the variations in customer attitudes and views regarding McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Domino's. The research by Xue et al. (2021) looked at how fast-food attitudes affect customers' purchase intents and intention patterns, how fast-food knowledge affects their tendencies to buy, and how the knowledge affects their intentions to buy. Farzin et al. (2023) investigated how sensory brand experience influences consumers' propensity to spend a premium price using data gathered from 387 fast food customer respondents. The goal of Fortuna and Firdausy's (2023) research is to examine the variables affecting customers' choices to buy from the McDonald's restaurant in Indonesia. The results of the investigation indicated that although food quality and price do not significantly affect customers' choices to buy McDonald's in Jakarta, marketing, location, and brand image do. Halal certification and marketing's effects on Muslim fast-food consum-

ers' attitudes were investigated by Roberts-Lombard et al. (2022) using data gathered from 306 Muslim fast-food customers.

H3: *The brand image positively influences online purchasing intention.*

2.4. Trendiness

Bloch (1995) asserts that the idea of "dominant styles and fashion" is strongly tied to the idea of being in style. Similar terms like fashionable, modern, contemporary, avant-garde, and young are frequently used to characterize trends (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005).

In several fields, trend identification is receiving greater and more attention (Jensen & Ekstrm, 2019). The desire for social validation of decisions, according to some, might explain why methods that show adopting a specific product is trendy are beneficial (Rhoads & Cialdini, 2002).

People frequently define their product designs using the product feature "trendiness" (Blijlevens et al., 2012; Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). People give a product higher aesthetic score when they believe it to be in style (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). Designers must thus understand what trendiness means to customers and what physical characteristics may be exploited to make a product design seem fashionable to produce visually attractive product designs.

The trend does not significantly affect purchasing intention, according to certain research in the literature (Astuti & Asih, 2021; Budiman, 2021; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021; Sihombing & Pramono, 2021; Soelasih & Sumani, 2021). The impacts of cellphones on personalizing purchasing intention, entertainment, engagement, social media marketing, trending, and e-WOM about smartphone purchases were explored by Wijaya et al. (2021) using data obtained from 217 customers in Indonesia.

- **H4:** *Trendiness positively moderates the relationship between e-WOM and online purchase intention.*
- **H5:** *Trendiness positively moderates the relationship between attitude and online purchase intention.*
- **H6:** *Trendiness positively moderates the relationship between brand image and online purchase intention.*

2.4. Online purchase intention

The consumer's desire to make a purchase is a crucial factor since it is completely tied to the marketing material. The buyer then plans to buy things that will either satiate their needs or produce customer value for them. The look of a product's quality or feature influences a buyer's intent to buy (Shakeel, 2015). According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived benefits and value drive and impact purchase intent. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), the possibility of acquiring a certain good or service is known as purchase intention, and a greater intention signals a higher probability.

According to the findings of a research project carried out by Núñez-Fernández et al. (2021), which was based on information gathered from 200 visitors of fast-food establishments in Mexico, two distinct models, specifically a fast-food establishment and a food courier service that operates using mobile applications, showed positive expectations. It was

investigated if feelings, attitudes, values, and subjective norms around food influenced a desire to acquire food.

Perceived relevance and involvement positively influence the choice to buy, according to research by Hanaysha (2022) based on data collected from patrons of several fast-food cafés in the United Arab Emirates. Moderator and mediation analyses were performed in research by Singh et al. (2022) based on 331 useful survey responses to demonstrate the beneficial impact of pricing fairness on customer retention and the positive influence of restaurants satisfaction factors on pricing equity. Ilmandani and Kusmayadi's (2022) research looked at how pricing and brand image affected consumers' decisions to buy from drive-thru restaurants. Mgiba and Pillay's (2024) research looked at how fast-food purchase intentions may be influenced by a website that is pleasant, high-quality, interactive, and offers excellent service. According to the findings of a research including 202 participants, some website characteristics have a beneficial impact on people's inclinations to buy fast food.

3. Methodology

3.1. Purpose

The purpose of the research is to analyses the impact of e-WOM, brand image, and consumer attitude on purchase intention, as well as the moderating influence of trendiness on these relationships. In the study, the intention of purchasing electronically functioned as the factor that was dependent, while e-WOM, brand image, and attitude functioned as independent variables, with trends acting as the moderator variable.

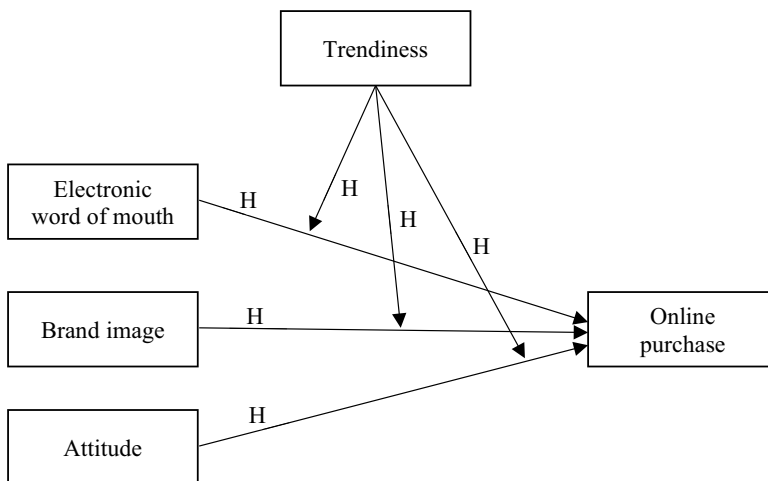Figure 1 illustrates the factors and hypotheses of the investigation.

Figure 1. Research model

3.2. Design

Fast foods play an important role in people's compound lifestyles. Although each country has various street delicacies and national dishes, the concept of fast food has come from developed countries as a reflection of the lifestyle. In general, fast food refers to the category of food purchased from places that do not provide direct waiter service to the table and can be ordered self-service or take-away food. The most important features of fast-food meals are that they are prepared quickly, the price is affordable, and they can be eaten easily. Accordingly, it is a sector where it is easy and convenient to use the trend variable. Each and every one of the measurements was based on a Likert scale of five points, with "5" indicating "strongly agree" and "1" indicating "strongly disagree".

A preliminary investigation was carried out in order to ascertain the brands of fast food that are eaten the most often before the survey was sent to customers, preliminary research was conducted to determine the most consumed fast-food brands. As a result of this research, McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, and Burger House took the first place as the most consumed fast-food brands in Azerbaijan. Therefore, the first question in the research was "What is the fast-food brand you order the most online?" The question was asked, and those who ordered products from these brands continued the survey.

3.3. Measures and procedure

For the purpose of evaluating the variables, studies from the existing body of research were used, and multi-item scales were utilized for the purpose of empirically evaluating the study model. We used three items from Kim and Ko (2010) to assess e-WOM, and five items from Alrwashdeh et al. (2019) to measure brand image. Jarvenpaa et al.'s (1999) three-item measures were modified to assess attitude. Pavlou's (2003) online purchase intention scales for the three goods were modified. Three items, including the moderating variable of trendiness, were taken from Kim and Ko (2010).

The analyses in this research were performed using SPSS 25.0. To evaluate the effects of e-WOM (H_1), attitude (H2), and brand image (H3) on online purchase intention, as well as the moderating influence of trendiness on these variables, simple regression was utilized as the analytic approach. Nevertheless, the moderator impact of trendiness was examined using SPSS PROCESS (H4, H5, H6).

The research model was put through its paces with the use of the Hayes (2022) PROCESS macro for SPSS. When it comes to analyzing indirect effects, one of the bootstrapping analytic methodologies that Hayes (2022) suggests using is called PROCESS macro-analysis. After the regression analysis was finished, which looked at how the variables affected each other, a study was done to see how the moderator variable affected the impacts these variables had on each other. This subsequent study aimed to determine the role of the moderator variable in influencing the relationships among the primary variables. By examining this effect, researchers could gain deeper insights into the dynamics at play within the data.

3.4. Sample profile and data collection

The findings of the research were derived from the replies that were provided by 922 individuals to the questions that were posed in the online survey. Of the persons who participated in the survey, 461 (50%) people are male, 877 (95.1%) are single, 542 (57.7%) are bachelor's degree, 874 (94.8%) are between the ages of 17–26, 670 (72.7%). The monthly income of individuals ranges from 0 to 250 AZN. Among them, 422 individuals, accounting for 45.8%, shop once a month. Additionally, 512 individuals, representing 55.5%, are individual consumers who have been purchasing from these brands for less than one year. Of the total population, 647 individuals (70.2%) resided in households comprising from three to five members. Table 1 summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Sample profile

Demographic variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	461	50.0%
	Female	461	50.0%
Marital status	Single	877	95.1%
	Married	45	4.9%
Education	School graduate	318	33.9%
	Bachelor's degree	542	57.7%
	Master's degree	49	5.2%
	PhD degree	13	1.4%
Age	17–26	874	94.8%
	27–36	36	3.9%
	37–46	8	0.9%
	47–56	2	0.2%
	57–66	2	0.2%
Annual income (AZN)	0–250	670	72.7%
	251–500	105	11.4%
	501–750	46	5.0%
	751–1000	34	3.7%
	1001–1250	23	2.5%
	1251–1500	12	1.3%
	1501–1750	4	0.4%
	1751–2000	6	0.7%
	2001 and over	22	2.4%
Number of people living in the same house	I live alone	30	3.3%
	I live with 2 people	62	6.7%
	I live with 3–5 people	647	70.2%
	I live with more than 5 people	183	19.8%
The most ordered fast-food brand	MC Donald's	599	65.0%
	KFC	259	28.1%
	Other brands	64	6.9%

Demographic variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency	Every day	19	2.1%
	Three times a week	43	4.7%
	Once a week	166	18.0%
	Three times a month	130	14.1%
	Twice a month	142	15.4%
	Once a month	422	45.8%
Duration	Less than 1 year	512	55.5%
	1–3 years	324	35.1%
	4–6 years	39	4.2%
	More than 6 years	47	5.1%

4. Analyses and results

4.1. Evaluation of the validity and reliability of the data

Composite reliability and Cronbac's alpha were used to assess the framework's components. In the beginning, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed (Table 2) in order to validate the measurement model. While all of the items had significant factor loadings, the variables remained the same as they were when they were first introduced. Before beginning the examination into the dependability of the scales, Cronbach's Alpha was used to make certain that the scales retained their internal consistency (Hair et al., 2010). The range of values for the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is from 0 to 1. The Cronbach's alpha and overall reliability exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 for all constructs (Hair et al., 2010). Chang et al. (2009) reported that the AVE values for all constructs exceeded the required threshold of 0.50. This suggests that speculative constructs were responsible for explaining more than half of the observed variability in the items.

Research indicates that each concept within the study model demonstrates sufficient levels of convergent validity and reliability. The constructs are eligible for further examination, according to the literature, according to reliability and validity tests (Butcher et al., 2002). On the other hand, convergent validity was shown by the fact that all of the factor loads of each item that were employed to investigate the variables in the theoretical framework were at the right level (Table 2).

Table 2. Factor analysis

Variables	Items	Factor load	Total variance explained	KMO	Cronbach alpha
e-WOM	I share information about products or services from this brand's social media with my friends.	0.587	100%	0.620	0.669
	I share the contents of this brand's social media on my Facebook or Instagram page.	0.721			

End of Table 2

Variables	Items	Factor load	Total variance explained	KMO	Cronbach alpha
	I share my thoughts about the products or services I get from this brand's social media with my friends.	0.606			
Attitude	Buying this brand online is attractive.	0.789	100%	0.629	0.747
	I like to shop online.	0.590			
	I think it's a good idea to buy from online stores.	0.604			
Brand image	This brand has high quality.	0.860	100%	0.861	0.873
	This brand has better features than its competitors.	0.838			
	This brand has an image that differentiates itself from its competitors.	0.874			
	I think this brand does not live up to the expectations of its customers.	0.873			
	This brand is one of the best brands in the sector.	0.862			
Trendiness	Content shared on social media of this brand is relevant.	0.742	100%	0.719	0.822
	This brand's social media usage is very trendy.	0.715			
	This is the brand's latest content on social media.	0.701			
Online purchase intention	Anyway, I'm thinking of shopping online.	0.725	100%	0.713	0.804
	I can bookmark a product that I will need to order online in the future.	0.711			
	I will probably be shopping online soon.	0.703			

4.2. Hypotheses analysis

With the stated goals of the research in mind, an investigation was conducted to determine whether or not e-WOM affected the propensity to buy anything online. The regression analysis indicated that e-WOM has a positive effect on purchasing intentions via the internet. This result was demonstrated by a beta coefficient of 0.349, which was statistically significant at a level of $p < 0.05$ (H1). Research into whether or not the image of the brand had any effect on the desire to make a purchase online was the next item that was carried out. At the $p < 0.05$ significance threshold (H2), it was found that it did in fact have an impact, and that effect was positive. The beta coefficient for this effect was computed to be 0.498. As a further step, an investigation was conducted to determine whether or not attitude had any effect on the intention to complete an online purchase. The findings revealed that attitude did have an effect, as shown by a beta coefficient of 0.62 at a significance level of $p < 0.05$ (H3).

When compared to other ratios in the social science literature, the R^2 and F values generated by the regression analysis procedure were deemed satisfactory. This was the result of the discovery that the R^2 value and the F values were acceptable. R, R^2, corrected R^2, B, Beta, and p-values are shown for each variable in Table 3, which may be found here.

Table 3. Regression analyses of the variables

Independent variable	Dependent variable	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	B	Beta	Sig.
e-WOM	Online purchase intention	0.349	0.122	0.121	0.325	0.349	0.000
Brand image	Online purchase intention	0.498	0.248	0.248	0.553	0.498	0.000
Attitude	Online purchase intention	0.620	0.385	0.384	0.611	0.620	0.000

For two of the three cases, we have used model 1 from Hayes' SPSS Process v4 (2022). The customary values of every component were used to concentrate it at first. Lastly, the product of the independent and moderator variables was used to estimate the interaction effect. A two-step linear regression analysis was used to assess the influence of the moderator variable. The model indicates that zero does not fall within the lower limit of confidential interval and the upper limit of confidential interval of "Int_1" when the analyses are interpreted in accordance with the conditions of the research hypotheses. This suggests that trendiness moderates the connections between e-WOM and online purchase intention (H4, Table 4).

**Table 4.** Moderation investigation of trendiness on online purchase intention and eWOM

Model summary	R	R^2	MSE	F	df1	df2	P
	0,4763	0.2269	0.5596	89.7852	3.0000	918.0000	0.0000
Model		coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	Constant	1.6769	0.3407	4.9221	0.0000	1.0083	2.3455
	Online purchase intention	–0.0773	0.0998	–0.7749	0.4386	–0.2732	0.1185
	Trendiness	0.1210	0.1051	1.1519	0.2501	–0.0853	0.3273
	Int_1	0.0824	0.0284	2.8985	0.0038	0.0266	0.1381
	Product terms key: Int_1: Online purchase intention x Trendiness						
	Y = e-WOM; X = Online purchase intention; M = Trendiness						
Conditional effect of X on Y at values of the moderator(s):	Trendiness	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	3.0000	0.1697	0.0364	4.6677	0.0000	0.984	0.2411
	3.3333	0.1972	0.0355	5.5560	0.0000	0.1275	0.2668
	4.0000	0.2521	0.0409	6.1643	0.0000	0.1718	0.3323

Trendiness moderates brand image-online purchase intention correlations (H5, Table 5). It should be noted that there was no effect of trendiness in the correlation between mentality and purpose to buy online (H6).

Table 5. Moderation investigation of trendiness on online purchase intention and brand image

Model summary	R	R²	MSE	F	df1	df2	P
	0.6441	0.4149	0.2983	217.0087	3.0000	918.0000	0.0000
Model		coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	Constant	0.2774	0.2487	1.1153	0.2650	−0.2107	0.7656
	Online purchase intention	0.5915	0.0729	8.1179	0.0000	0.4485	0.7345
	Trendiness	0.7738	0.0768	10.0805	0.0000	0.6232	0.9245
	Int_1	−0.1013	0.0207	04.8851	0.0000	−0.1421	−0.0606
	Product terms key: Int_1: Online purchase intention x Trendiness						
	Y = Brand Image; X = Online purchase intention; M = Trendiness						
Conditional effect of X on Y at values of the moderator(s):	Trendiness	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	3.0000	0.2875	0.0266	10.8283	0.0000	0.2354	0.3396
	3.3333	0.2537	0.0259	9.7909	0.0000	0.2029	0.3046
	4.0000	0.1861	0.0299	6.2343	0.0000	0.1275	0.2447

The research framework was constructed in the manner shown in Figure 2 as a consequence of the examination of the hypotheses.
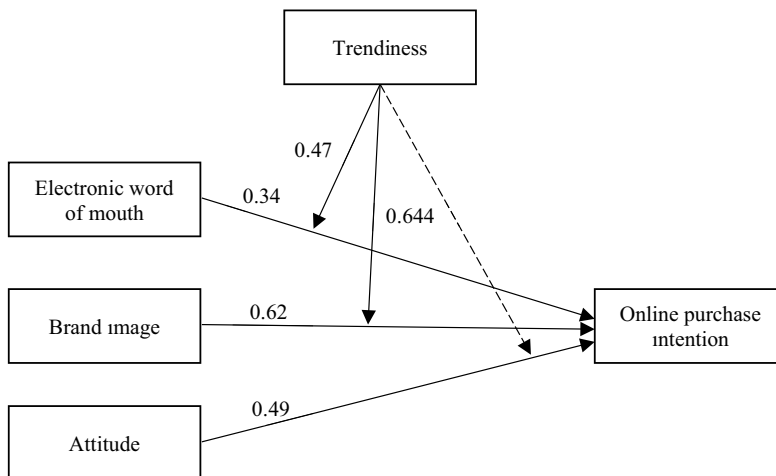
Figure 2. The hypothesis results on the research model.

Because of the analyses that were carried out in accordance with the objectives and procedures of the study, a total of six hypotheses were put to the test. Only one of the six hypotheses that were examined in the study model was found to be incorrect, while the other five hypotheses were found to be correct (Table 6).

Table 6. The result of the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Result
H1: e-WOM positively influences online purchasing intentions.	Accepted
H2: Attitude positively influences online purchasing intention.	Accepted
H3: The brand image positively influences online purchasing intention.	Accepted
H4: Trendiness positively moderates the relationship between e-WOM and online purchase intention.	Accepted
H5: Trendiness positively moderates the relationship between attitude and online purchase intention.	Rejected
H6: Trendiness positively moderates the relationship between brand image and online purchase intention.	Accepted

5. Discussion, implementation and conclusions

5.1. Discussion

Dave et al. (2009) found that public education on fast-food's harmful characteristics may not affect its popularity. Based on studies that Tabassum and Rahman (2012) carried out, it has been shown that the attitude of customers that is the most favorable is one that is antagonistic toward Pizza Hut. It was also shown that customers had the highest levels of satisfaction with the meal quality and atmosphere at Pizza Hut, and the highest levels of satisfaction with the food pricing and timely services at KFC. According to the responses that customers gave to our survey, McDonald's (599 individuals, or 65%) and KFC (259 people, or 28.1%) are the two brands that customers most often shop at online.

Findings from the study conducted by Saraniya and Kennedy (2015), the predominant notion that prevails among the population of Sri Lanka is that those with higher incomes are the only ones that consume fast food. According to the findings of the research that was carried out by Hussain (2018), there is a significant association between the five senses and the image of a company as well as the loyalty of its customers. The study conducted by Akhter (2019) revealed that 94.2% of respondents like fast food, with 48.10% visiting one to three times each month. In our study, 75.3% of the 922 participants said that they bought fast food one to three times each month (422 individuals).

Customer happiness, brand attachment, and brand loyalty are all favorably impacted by brand image, according to Cuong's (2020) research. Our study results indicate that brand impression significantly and positively influences customer purchasing propensity. The research conducted by Rasanthika and Gunawardana (2013) revealed that the perceived convenience of fast food significantly enhances its consumption, while taste, nutritional value, and price positively influence consumption, albeit without statistical significance. Musaiger (2014) found that people's views on fast food are influenced by cultural and social variables.

The intensity of consuming fast food was found to be individually associated with demographic factors (specifically age, gender, and marital status). As people become older, they eat at fast food places less often. This trend continues even after they retire. It was also shown that males consume fast food more often than women do on average. This difference was

considered to be significant. These results are in line with what has been discovered in previous research (Satia et al., 2004; Pereira et al., 2005). Marital status independently correlates with the frequency of fast-food intake, with single persons exhibiting a higher propensity to dine at fast food establishments compared to married individuals, those cohabiting, or those who are divorced or separated (Dave et al., 2009). Satia et al. (2004) backed this discovery with their findings. Those who had never been married and those who were married, or cohabiting ate fast food more than those who were divorced, separated, or bereaved.

The regression tests indicated that e-WOM, the perception of the brand, and brand perception have an impact on online purchase intention. This study for the first time statistically analyzed the moderating effects of the trendiness variable on the influence of e-WOM, brand image, and attitude factors on online purchase intention. The analysis indicated that the moderating role of trendiness has a significant and positive impact on the relationship between e-WOM's online purchase intention and brand image with online purchase intention. However, its moderating role concerning the effect of attitude on online purchase intention was deemed insignificant.

For many nations, oil prices are crucial to their long-term economic growth (Huseynli, 2024). Azerbaijan is one of these countries. However, since the development of the non-oil economy of oil revenues is a strategic goal in Azerbaijan (Huseynli, 2022b, 2022c), it is thought that such studies will contribute to the development of the non-oil sector. As a result of the study, they should know that fast-food brands in Azerbaijan will follow the trends and increase their brand image and thus purchasing. It is possible to say that the trendiness does not affect the attitudes of consumers, and that consumer attitudes are caused and affected by different variables.

5.2. Conclusions

The investigation utilized data gathered from 922 customers who engaged in online transactions with fast-food brands in Azerbaijan. As a result, the statistical examination of the data gathered from the participants indicated that both the validity and reliability assessments showed strong performance. After the descriptive analysis, the hypotheses put forward theoretically in the research model were tested.

The literature has extensively examined the impact of cultural, economic, and psychological factors on the rise of fast-food consumption and consumer preferences. However, these studies generally focus on the direct effects of variables such as attitude or brand image, while the role of consumer perception of "trendiness" in these effects has been overlooked. This study found that trendiness strengthens the relationships between e-WOM, brand image, and purchase intention; this reveals a new relationship not explored in the existing literature. This new finding suggests that marketing strategies should be adapted to the dynamics of the digital age.

This research, using data particular to Azerbaijan, significantly enhances the literature on the distinctive consumer patterns within regional marketplaces. In this context, examining the impact of trendiness within a local and cultural context can form the basis for comparative studies with other countries. Furthermore, it reaffirmed the positive effects of e-WOM, brand

image, and attitude on online purchase intention, demonstrating that these relationships are also valid in the Azerbaijani context. Moreover, a notable addition of the research, which analyzed the moderating effect of the trendiness variable, demonstrated an enhancement of the association among e-WOM, brand image, and purchase intention. The absence of a notable moderating impact of trendiness on the connection between attitude and purchase intention indicates that attitude is a more intrinsic and stable factor that directly affects purchase intention. This could open new discussions in the marketing literature, drawing on the dynamics of attitude and its resilience to external influences.

However, the lack of a significant effect of the attitude variable on purchase intention under the moderation of trendiness may stem from psychological complexities overlooked in the literature. This result suggests that the impact of consumer attitudes on purchase decisions may be shaped differently than external factors such as trend perception. Therefore, future research should explore more in-depth how consumer attitudes are influenced in different contexts. Investigating the moderating effect of socio-cultural variables such as trendiness has demonstrated the importance of new analytical approaches in marketing studies. Examining the effects of such variables in different contexts and on different consumer behaviors provides an important methodological roadmap for future research.

5.3. Implications

Ultimately, the data supports four of the six proposed hypotheses. This study enhances the existing literature in several aspects. Initially, it pertains to the theoretical moderator function of trendiness. Specifically, the literature contains research examining the influence of e-WOM, brand image, and consumer attitude on online purchase intentions. This study explored the moderating role of trendiness on the influence of these factors on online shopping intention.

This research has some management implications. Although e-WOM, brand image and attitude have an impact on fast-food brands' online purchasing intention, the fact that the trendiness also affects this process has revealed that companies need to update their own products and services. It should be noted that although the moderator effect of the trendiness had a significant and positive effect on the effect of e-WOM and brand image on online purchase intention, it was not significant on attitude. This revealed that the trendiness does not influence the attitude of the consumers but is an important factor in the e-WOM and brand image. In other words, the fact that brands follow the trendiness will have a positive effect on their brand image and thus on their purchase intention.

Finally, the study was investigated in all aspects with a good sample size (922 participants) in Azerbaijan. This further validates the study's contributions and highlights the uniqueness of the findings.

5.4. Future research and limitations

Several restrictions are imposed by the research. In the first step of the process, information on fast food was gathered from individuals who reported instances of consuming fast food in Azerbaijan. The second point is that different respondents may have different opinions about fast-food establishments, and the brand names that are included in the questions may have

an effect on the results. Additionally, Azerbaijan is identified as one of the nations in which the size of the market for fast food is expanding at a rapid pace. Additionally, the shifting social and familial structures of the Azerbaijani people have an impact on the dietary practices of the population. The food sector in Azerbaijan was also targeted by foreign investors for the aim of investment (Budagova, 2020). From this vantage point, we think it would be appropriate for future studies to look at the issues surrounding fast food consumption, customer satisfaction with fast food restaurants, and branding.

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Author contributions

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Disclosure statement

The author declares that they have no relevant or material financial interests that relate to the research described in this paper.

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