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# Corporate Reputation and eWOM: exploring the moderating role of brand love on the automobile industry

## *Reputación corporativa y eCBO: explorando el rol moderador del amor de marca en la industria del automóvil*

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**Abstract:** this study analyzes the relationships between corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, customer brand engagement and electronic word of mouth (eWOM), with a particular focus on the moderating effect of brand love. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling - partial least squares (SEM-PLS) on a sample of 317 customers who purchased automobiles during 2020-2022. Corporate reputation, mediated by satisfaction, increases customer brand engagement, which in turn drives eWOM for car brands. Brand uniqueness and perceived price fairness are robust predictors of corporate reputation. The impact of this reputation on customer satisfaction with the car dealership is weaker for customers who love the car brand purchased. This work is novel in explaining eWOM through corporate reputation, satisfaction and customer brand engagement. It also provides new insights by unveiling: (i) the negative moderating effect of brand love in the corporate reputation-satisfaction relationship (ii) the mediating effect of satisfaction in linking corporate reputation to customer brand engagement; (iii) how corporate reputation can be explained through the effects of brand uniqueness and perceived price fairness of the car dealership.

**Keywords:** recomendation, cars, reputation, engagement, satisfaction, brands, price, customers..

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**Resumen:** este estudio analiza las relaciones entre la reputación corporativa, satisfacción del cliente, compromiso con la marca y comunicación boca-oído (eCBO) con especial atención al efecto moderador del amor a la marca. El análisis de datos se realizó mediante modelos de ecuaciones estructurales con mínimos cuadrados parciales (SEM-PLS) con una muestra de 317 compradores de automóviles durante 2020-2022. La reputación corporativa, mediada por la satisfacción, aumenta el compromiso con la marca del cliente, lo que a su vez impulsa el eCBO para las marcas de automóviles. El carácter distintivo de la marca y la justicia percibida en precios son predictores robustos de la reputación corporativa. El impacto de la reputación corporativa en la satisfacción del cliente con el concesionario de automóviles es menor para los clientes que aman la marca del automóvil adquirido. Este trabajo es novedoso al explicar la eCBO a través de la reputación corporativa, la satisfacción y el compromiso de la marca del cliente. También proporciona nuevos conocimientos al revelar: (i) el papel moderador negativo del amor a la marca en la relación entre la reputación corporativa y la satisfacción (ii) el papel mediador de la satisfacción al vincular la reputación corporativa con el compromiso de la marca del cliente; (iii) cómo se puede explicar la reputación corporativa a través de los efectos del carácter distintivo de la marca y la justicia percibida en precios del concesionario.

**Palabras clave:** recomendación, automóviles, reputación, compromiso, satisfacción, marcas, precio, clientes.

## Introduction

In the digital economy age, digital transformation is regarded as a company strategy important for competitiveness (Chen and Liao, 2024). Consequently, the increasing use of social media, with technological changes, promotes electronic word of mouth (eWOM). When looking for a car, buyers consult eWOM, which influences their purchase intentions. Positive eWOM ratings from customers can also affect their peers´ purchase decisions (Mukhopadhyay *et al*., 2023). Social media offers vast opportunities for the automobile industry. These platforms allow faster and more cost-effective information dissemination, enabling car companies to boost sales and reach revenue targets more quickly. Many marketers leverage eWOM because it comes from trusted sources (Mukhopadhyay *et al*., 2023).

A strong company reputation is decisive for achieving and maintaining competitive advantage in the automobile industry (Quintana *et al.*, 2021). Reputation is built by a company's value-creation activities: the intangibility of reputation makes it difficult for competitors to imitate. A favorable reputation has been shown to be important for achieving success in the automobile marketplace, because it has been proven to be key in clients' buying decisions (Sanchez-Iglesias *et al*., 2024).

In the automobile industry, with its high value brands, signaling theory is important. A car dealership's corporate reputation has a signaling effect on consumers' perceptions of the quality and uniqueness of the car brands it sells. These perceptions reduce pre-purchase uncertainty and influence behavioral intentions (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2022). Prospective customers regard high-value, distinctive brands as indicators of strong company management (Sanchez-Iglesias *et al*., 2024). Similarly, other players in the game, such as current clients and company staff, can also interpret these signals. Automobile customers care deeply not only about brand quality, but also about price fairness. Previous work has examined the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) actions on consumers' perceptions of price fairness (Quintana *et al.*, 2021). The present study goes a step beyond this by analyzing the effect of perceived brand uniqueness and price fairness on corporate reputation.

The relevance of customer brand engagement (CBE) has encouraged researchers to explore its antecedents. Customer satisfaction has a complex relationship with CBE. While some studies have suggested that customer satisfaction positively affects CBE, others have indicated they have a more nuanced interaction. The suggestion has been made that cumulative customer satisfaction may not always lead to increased CBE and, indeed, in some cases, high customer engagement levels can, over time, even reduce satisfaction, which implies that the effect of customer satisfaction on CBE can vary due to extent of the engagement, the specific context and individual preferences and behaviors (Sanchez-Iglesias *et al.*, 2024)


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Considerable research has examined brand love (Gumparthi and Patra, 2020); it has been shown to be associated with (i) positive word of mouth (WOM) (ii) forgiveness of brand failures and (iii) brand loyalty. However, a critical knowledge gap remains in the understanding of the moderating effects of brand love on consumer-brand relationships.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationships between corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, customer brand engagement and eWOM, paying special attention to the moderating effect of brand love. This study is expected to enrich the body of knowledge of consumer-brand relationships by analyzing the effects of two crucial consumer perceptions (brand uniqueness and price fairness in business transactions) on corporate reputation. The study also adds novel insights by revealing that satisfaction has a full mediating effect on the relationships between corporate reputation and eWOM.

## Literature review

Corporate reputation plays a critical role in today's dynamic and competitive business environment, serving as a key driver for long-term sustainability, market differentiation, and strong stakeholder relationships. (Mohd Sofian *et al.*, 2023). Corporate reputation is based on positive consumer perceptions of a company, especially in innovation, managerial leadership, product and service quality and image (Osakwe and Yusuf, 2021). Sales forces/managers should exhibit a range of fundamental values, such as honesty, responsibility, fairness, respect, openness and good citizenship. Company personnel should be seen to be worthy of trust and to be providing good advice. Moreover, corporate reputation is fundamental to a company's success and significantly influences various facets of its operations and results (Nuortimo *et al*., 2024). Corporate reputation has a signaling effect which helps increase customer trust-based relationships. Through these relationships, corporate reputation contributes to increased trustworthiness and the integrity of exchanges (Oghazi *et al*., 2021). Companies that are transparent and open with their consumers and stakeholders about their dedication to sustainable and fair business practices are more likely to build trust and cultivate lasting partnerships (Loke and Chamlal, 2025). A company´s reputation is based on customers' opinions on a range of issues/behaviors, for example, how it operates in the labor, capital and product markets. In this study we analyze general corporate reputation rather than any one dimension of corporate reputation, such as environmental activities, to address the halo effect, a cognition-based bias in which consumers´ perceptions of how a company operates in one field impact on their opinions about the entity in other areas. We regard the corporate reputation of a car dealership as the aggregated perceptions of all its customers in terms of whether it is honest, competent and concerned about its customers.

Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) defined CBE as "a consumer's positively-valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity during or related to specific consumer–brand interactions" (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014, p.154).This study adopts Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) approach, that is, we take: the cognitive dimension of CBE as being the client's degree of car brand-based thought processing developed due to his/her exchanges with the car dealerhip; the affective dimension of CBE reflects the positive emotions a client experiences toward the car brand, shaped by their interactions with the salesperson. Meanwhile, the behavioral dimension represents the effort, energy, and time the client invests in engaging with the brand throughout their journey.

## Hypotheses development

Perceived brand uniqueness has been described as those brand-related aspects which distinguish one brand from another (Dwivedi *et al*., 2018). This reflects the "differentness" of a brand and its salience, such that it is readily recognized/comes to mind, when compared to competitors. Perceived uniqueness relates to the analysis-based data (signals) that distinguish a brand from its competitors; it lessens the client´s cognitive burden.

Corporate reputation is based on consumers´ judgments of a company´s attributes which, of course, shape the esteem in which they hold the company. Syah and Olivia (2022) argued that product/service quality and interactional experiences are key shapers of consumers´ views of a company´s reputation. In the present study it is argued that consumers´ perceptions of a car brand´s uniqueness can improve the corporate reputation of the car dealership. The basis for this argument is that brand uniqueness offers potential client's analytical information about a brand´s attributes and evokes positive consumption emotions which reduce their cognitive burden when assessing corporate reputation, which can generate a positive assessment of the company. Thus,

*$H_1$: The perception of customers' brand uniqueness increases the corporate reputation of the car dealership.*

Perceived price fairness is a vital component for any service provider delivering its product/service to the automotive industry's target market; consumers are ever more interested in enhanced value-for-money (Gupta and Raman, 2022).

The influence of price fairness on corporate reputation can be grounded on attribution theory (Weiner, 2018), which examines consumers' cognition-based processing when making cause and effect judgments. Perceived price fairness influences consumers´ behaviors. Consumers are inclined to respond make favorable purchase decisions when prices are perceived as fair, which makes them develop a positive attitude toward the company. Consumers' perceptions of fairness in pricing can both increase and lessen corporate reputation, depending on several factors (Fitri and Wulandari, 2020). For instance, when consumers perceive a price increase as unfair, it can lead to negative emotions and behavioral intentions, potentially harming the company's reputation. On the other hand, implementing marketing campaigns with transparent pricing strategies can positively influence consumers' perceptions of perceived price fairness, enhancing corporate reputation. Based on attribution theory, we posit that when the consumer has high price fairness perceptions, (s)he will have a positive global opinion of the reputation of the car dealership:

*$H_2$: The greater the consumer´s perceptions of price fairness, the higher will be the corporate reputation of the car dealership.*

Consumer satisfaction is an attitude, emotional response assessment made by the consumer about the service supplier (Mairani *et al.*, 2019). Customer satisfaction is defined as the degree to which a customer's expectations are met following their experience with a product or service. It reflects the level of fulfillment or contentment a customer feels as a result of their interaction with a business (Singh *et al.*, 2023). The influence of corporate reputation on satisfaction is grounded in cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Customer satisfaction is based on the consumer's global assessment of the complete purchasing and consumption experience during the whole process (Montazeri, 2024). If a consumer feels (s)he has had a good product-based experience, (s)he will be satisfied. When this same consumer later evaluates the reputation of the product manufacturer (which (s)he hitherto barely knew) (s)he will most probably mark it highly. To do otherwise would result in a state of imbalance/cognitive dissonance. The consumer avoids this disequilibrium and maintains cognitive consonance by adapting his/her views of the firm´s reputation to match his/her feelings of satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is one of the main dimensions of the extent of a company's relationships with its customers. Galbreath and Shum (2012) argued that company reputation is a key factor in customers´ perceptions/evaluations of companies. A company's reputational signals are used by consumers to increase their feelings of certainty. When a company suffers from a bad reputation, consumers may develop negative opinions of its products/services based on their personal exchanges with the entity, which can reduce satisfaction. When a company enjoys a good reputation, however, the client´s positive opinions and satisfaction are bolstered. On the basis of a review of the


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literature we propose that:

*$H_3$: The corporate reputation of the car dealership positively affects customer satisfaction with the dealership.*

It has been argued that the impact of corporate reputation on customer engagement is in line with cognitive appraisal theory (Bagozzi *et al.*,1999), which proposes that people´s subjective assessment of situations evokes (positive and negative) emotional/behavioral responses. It is proposed in this study that corporate reputation, in addition, positively impacts on affective and behavioral CBE. Consumers will, with greater probability, develop affective links with, and come to trust, auto dealerships that always provide fair-priced, high-quality service.

Corporate reputation has been shown to influence customer brand engagement, based on the positive emotions (toward the brand) that it provokes in him/her. The result of repeated positive experiences only strengthens this mutual interaction (Martínez-López *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

*$H_4$: The better the corporate reputation of the car dealership, the higher the customer brand engagement.*

Brodie *et al.* (2013) argued that customer brand engagement reflects their inherent motivational, emotional, cognitive and intentional states, and that its intensity is based on brand stimuli (e.g. activities). In addition, they argued that it is generated from deep memories of the brand that evoke thoughts and feelings about the brand. A satisfied consumer attitude toward the brand based on the uniqueness of its products and services creates attachment to the brand.

Customer satisfaction has been related to customer brand engagement, both as an antecedent and as a consequence (Sánchez-Iglesias *et al.*, 2024). Without customer satisfaction, there can be no engagement (Brodie *et al*., 2013). At the same time, when customers are dissatisfied, they either disengage from the organization or engage with it less. Recent research suggests that customer satisfaction affects purchase intentions; satisfied customers display their positivity through their company-focused behaviors (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Sánchez-Iglesias *et al*., 2024). Therefore:

*$H_5$: Higher customer satisfaction with a car dealership creates higher customer brand engagement.*

Brand love is much discussed in the relevant literature. It has been defined as a profound emotional connectivity to a particular brand, characterized by passion and a feeling of naturalness in the relationship that prompts the person to keep it in mind, recommend and use it (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Previous studies seem to agree about the positive outcomes it can provide to businesses. Nonetheless, varying opinions have been published about its moderating effect in the consumer-brand relationships and consumer behavior nexus.

The "love is blind" effect makes parties to a relationship more tolerant of the mistakes other parties make, thus preventing negative emotions. However, the "love becomes hate" effect is based on the proposal that when people undergo a poor product/service interaction with their treasured brand they feel a sense of betrayal, and "turn against" it (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018).

As previous research has drawn inconsistent conclusions about the role of brand love, the following RQ is posed:

*$RQ_1$: Has brand love a moderating effect on the impact of the corporate reputation of the car dealership on customer satisfaction with the car dealership?*

Customer satisfaction has been shown to be an important antecedent of the success of entities and to have a significant impact on behaviors, repurchase intentions and WOM (Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt, 2000).

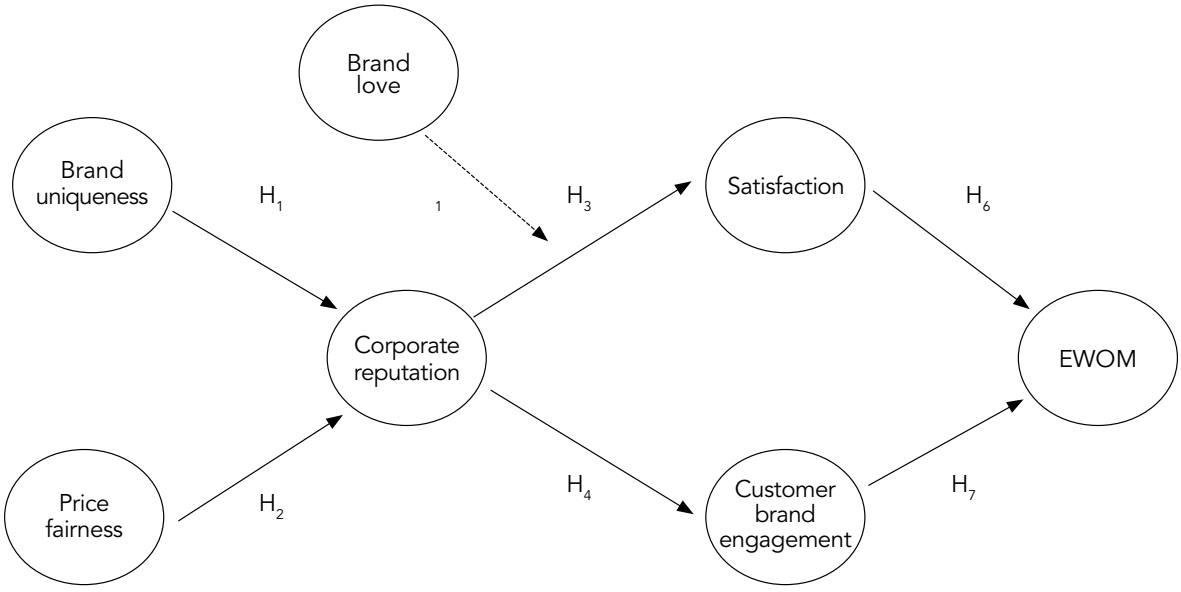
Several studies have demonstrated that customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction plays a crucial role in shaping electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior (Kim and Hwang, 2022). Pereira *et al.* (2017) argued that satisfied online customers are more likely to shop again and recommend online retailers to others. Therefore,

*$H_6$: The higher the consumer's satisfaction, the higher will be his/her intention to spread positive eWOM about car brands.*

Cheung *et al.* (2022) argued that CBE is the extent of the cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement that people show in their exchanges with brands. Many researchers who have addressed the concept of CBE agree that it leads to positive behavioral outcomes (Lim *et al*., 2022; Prentice *et al*., 2020). Therefore, we propose that car dealerships which prioritize the creation and reinforcement of CBE are likely to generate positive eWOM for their vehicles. Moreover, Knoll (2016) and Ismagilova *et al.* (2017) argued that customers highly engaged with a brand are more likely to participate in eWOM.

*$H_7$: The higher the customer brand engagement, the higher will be consumers' intentions to spread positive eWOM about car brands.*

**Figure 1**
*Research model*




## Materials and methods

The empirical study was undertaken with a very prominent Jordanian car dealership, Abu Khader. This business type is worthy of research because the actual product category (cars) has major customer involvement and significant industrial and economic impacts. The sector is among the world´s most extensive and complex. Some 90.1M cars were registered globally in 2023, up some 11% over 2022 (Research and Markets, 2023). This ramp up was due to various issues, among them greater competition and the move toward greener transport solutions. The automobile sector in Jordan has been growing significantly in recent years, with its expansion being more rapid than most of its regional neighbors (Research and Markets, 2023). With a positive economic prognosis and elevated household buying power, Jordan is forecast to see a significant surge in auto purchases through 2030.

A quantitative study was conducted during March-October 2023. An online questionnaire was sent to 1,300 people who bought a vehicle from the dealer during 2020-2022. A URL was sent to the sample to which they had access for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one month. The sample was developed using the company´s customer relationship management system. While there are result-generalization issues with data collected from a single source, this method permitted us to undertake an analysis in some detail (Sørensen *et al*., 2020). We used a non-probabilistic convenience sampling procedure.

The survey initially was produced in the English language and thereafter rendered into the Arabic language. Some 317 valid responses were received. We operationalized the study constructs using Likert scales, from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). The items and sources are listed at Table 1.

**Table 1**
*Scales used in the research*

| Construct | Item | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Brand Engagement (BE) | **How would you describe your interactions with your favorite car brand purchased from AK Automotive?**<br>**Cognitive engagement**<br>**BE1.** Using car brand x makes me think about car brand x.<br>**BE2.** I think about car brand x a lot when I'm using it.<br>**BE3.** Using car brand x stimulates my interest to learn more about car brand x.<br>**Affective engagement**<br>**BE4.** I feel very positive when I use car brand x.<br>**BE5.** Using car brand x makes me happy.<br>**BE6.** I feel good when I use car brand x.<br>**BE7.** I'm proud to use car brand x.<br>**Behavioral engagement**<br>**BE8.** I spend a lot more time using car brand x than using other car brands.<br>**BE9.** Whenever I use cars, I normally use car brand x.<br>**BE10.** Car brand x is one of the brands I normally use when I use cars | Hollebeek *et al*. (2014) |
| Price fairness (PF) | **PF1.** The car dealership charged a fair price for the car I bought.<br>**PF2.** I felt I was not taken advantage of by the car dealership.<br>**PF3.** The price I paid for labor in the car dealership was fair.<br>**PF4.** The price I paid for parts in the car dealership was fair.<br>**PF5.** I left the car dealership knowing I was fairly treated | Andaleeb and Basu (1994) |
| Electronic word of mouth. (eWOM) | **EWOM1.** I will write positive comments on social media regarding my experience in Abu Khader.<br>**EWOM2.** I will recommend buying a car in Abu Khader through social media. | Dwivedi *et al*. (2018) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Corporate Reputation (CR) | **CR1.** The information offered by the car dealership is sincere and honest.<br>**CR2.** The car dealership is concerned with the present and future interests of its customers.<br>**CR3.** The car dealership has the necessary resources to successfully carry out its activities | Doney and Canon (1997) |
| Brand Uniqueness (BU) | **BU1.** I feel that car brand x really stands out from other automobile brands.<br>**BU2.** I think that car brand x is distinct from other brands of automobile.<br>**BU3.** Car brand x is unique from other automobile brands.<br>**BU4.** Car brand x offers very different products than other automobile brands. | Dwivedi *et al*. (2018) |
| Satisfaction (SAT) | **SAT1.** This car dealership is one of the best I could have visited.<br>**SAT2.** I am satisfied with my decision to buy a car in this car dealership. | Oliver (1980) |
| Brand love (LOV) | **LOV1.** Car brand x makes me feel good<br>**LOV2.** Car brand x is awesome.<br>**LOV3.** I do not have neutral feelings about car brand x<br>**LOV4.** Car brand x makes me very happy<br>**LOV5.** I love car brand x! | Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) |

## Results and discussion

Given the sample size, and the lack of certainty in the normal distribution of the data, we employed the PLS-SEM estimation approach. The parameter estimation was carried out using Smart-PLS 4.0 (Ringle *et al.*, 2023), and we performed bootstrapping with 10,000 samples to determine how significant were the parameters.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) found that the relationships ($p < 0.01$) between the items and their respective factors (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) were significant, as outlined in Table 2. The composite reliabilities of the constructs were above the suggested limit of 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) and their average variance extracted (AVE) values were greater than the 0.50 recommendation.


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**Table 2**

*Reliability and convergent validity of the measurement instrument*

| Factors | Item | Std loadings | t value (bootstrapping) | Cronbach's alpha | rho_A | CR | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction (SAT) | SAT1 | 0.96 | 126.65* | 0.92 | 0.92 | 0.96 | 0.92 |
| | SAT2 | 0.96 | 141.51* | | | | |
| Corporate reputation (CR) | CR1 | 0.95 | 156.90* | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.96 | 0.89 |
| | CR2 | 0.95 | 141.10* | | | | |
| | CR3 | 0.94 | 110.76* | | | | |
| Price Fairness (PF) | PF1 | 0.93 | 86.13* | 0.95 | 0.96 | 0.96 | 0.84 |
| | PF2 | 0.91 | 59.10* | | | | |
| | PF3 | 0.93 | 75.04* | | | | |
| | PF4 | 0.91 | 62.95* | | | | |
| | PF5 | 0.91 | 84.83 | | | | |
| Customer brand engagement (CBE) | CBE1 | 0.90 | 81,97* | 0.98 | 0.98 | 0.98 | 0.82 |
| | CBE2 | 0.90 | 69.33* | | | | |
| | CBE3 | 0.90 | 70.42* | | | | |
| | CBE4 | 0.92 | 95.04* | | | | |
| | CBE5 | 0.93 | 95.00* | | | | |
| | CBE6 | 0.92 | 87.70* | | | | |
| | CBE7 | 0.93 | 117.47* | | | | |
| | CBE8 | 0.90 | 74.49* | | | | |
| | CBE9 | 0.90 | 51.69* | | | | |
| | CBE10 | 0.88 | 43.55 | | | | |
| Brand Uniqueness (BU) | BU1 | 0.93 | 131.02 | 0.94 | 0.95 | 0.96 | 0.86 |
| | BU2 | 0.93 | 101.52* | | | | |
| | BU3 | 0.93 | 109.30* | | | | |
| | BU4 | 0.91 | 73.92* | | | | |
| Electronic word of mouth (EWOM) | EWOM1 | 0.97 | 304.90* | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.97 | 0.95 |
| | EWOM2 | 0.97 | 257.81* | | | | |

*Note.* rho_A=Dijkstra-Henseler rho; CR=Composite reliability; AVE=Average variance extracted*p<.01

The Fornell and Larcker (1981) and heterotrait-monotrait ratio methods were used to assess the measurement model´s capacity to distinguish between constructs. We found that the square roots of the AVEs were above the inter-construct correlation values (Table 3, above the diagonal); and that the heterotrait-monotrait ratios (Table 3, below the diagonal) demonstrated that the model has discriminant validity.

**Table 3**
*Discriminant validity of the measurement model*

| Factor | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 | F6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F1. Corporate reputation | 0.95 | 0.78 | 0.56 | 0.52 | 0.70 | 0.57 |
| F2. Satisfaction | 0.84 | 0.96 | 0.61 | 0.58 | 0.83 | 0.68 |
| F3. Brand uniqueness | 0.60 | 0.66 | 0.93 | 0.85 | 0.58 | 0.42 |
| F4. Customer brand engagement | 0.54 | 0.61 | 0.88 | 0.91 | 0.61 | 0.40 |
| F5. Electronic word of mouth | 0.74 | 0.89 | 0.61 | 0.64 | 0.97 | 0.67 |
| F6. Price Fairness | 0.60 | 0.72 | 0.44 | 0.41 | 0.70 | 0.92 |

*Note.* The square roots of the AVEs are on the diagonal. The HTMT ratios feature in the lower triangle, the latent variable correlations in the upper.

Table 4 presents the results of the hypothesis testing, including the standardized coefficients for the structural paths and the corresponding t-statistics with their significance levels.

**Table 4**
*Hypotheses testing*

| Relationship | Std. beta | t value (bootstrapping) | CI | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 2.50 | 97.5 |
| H1. Brand uniqueness -> Corporate reputation | 0.39 | 7.55 | 0 | 0.49 |
| H2. Price fairness -> Corporate reputation | 0.41 | 7.89 | 0.31 | 0.51 |
| H3. Corporate reputation -> Satisfaction | 0.78 | 27.86 | 0.72 | 0.83 |
| H4. Corporate reputation -> Customer brand engagement | 0.18 | 2.23 | 0 | 0.34 |
| H5. Satisfaction -> Customer brand engagement | 0.44 | 5.60** | 0.28 | 0.59 |
| H6. Satisfaction -> EWOM | 0.72 | 15.52** | 0.62 | 0.80 |
| H7. Customer brand engagement -> EWOM | 0.20 | 4.54** | 0.11 | 0 |

*Nota.* *= p<.05; **=p<.01
R2: Corporate reputation = .46; Satisfaction = .61; Customer brand engagement = .35; EWOM=.71
PLSPredict $Q^2$: Corporate reputation = .45; Satisfaction = .53; Customer brand engagement = .39; EWOM=.46

The model estimation demonstrated that brand uniqueness (H1 accepted; β= .39) and perceived price fairness (H2 accepted; β= .41) are two important antecedents of corporate reputation. The role of perceived price fairness in car dealerships' corporate reputations is supported


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by attribution theory (Weiner, 2018). Consumers are more likely to make positive judgments about the reputation of a car dealership when its prices are perceived as being fair. Corporate reputation, in turn, is a powerful predictor of brand satisfaction (H3 accepted; β= .78) and customer brand engagement (H4 accepted; β= .18). The results also showed the impact of corporate reputation on customer satisfaction, highlighting why managers should regard reputation as essential for influencing customer behavior and outperforming competitors (Poan & Verin, 2024). Furthermore, dealership satisfaction positively and significantly influenced customer brand engagement (H5 accepted; β= .44), and it translates into greater eWOM (H6 accepted; β= .72). Finally, customer brand engagement positively influenced eWOM (H7 accepted; β= .2).

To confirm the mediation role of satisfaction in the influence of reputation on brand engagement, we estimated a new model that eliminated the path between satisfaction and engagement. As is shown in the results of the estimation of the models before and after introducing the mediator (Table 5), satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between corporate reputation and customer brand engagement (the indirect effect being greater than the direct).

**Table 5**
*Mediation analysis of satisfaction*

| Relationship | Direct effect before introducing mediator | Direct effect after introducing mediator | Indirect effect. | Mediation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reputation -> Engagement | .52** | .18 | .34** | |

*Note.* *p<.05; **p<.01.

Finally, we analyzed brand love´s moderating role in the impact of corporate reputation on satisfaction (RQ1). We measured brand love with a 5-item adaptation of the scale proposed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). First, we calculated an index of brand love (i.e., BL; a = .98) for the customers of the car dealership, splitting them into two equal sections (using the midpoint of the brand love values = 3.6). Thus, we identified one group of the car dealership customers with more BL (n = 148; M = 4.21) and another with less BL (n =153; M = 2.71), statistically different (t = 21.73; p < .01). To assess the between-groups differences in the specific path coefficients within the model (excluding the global model), the non-parametric permutation-based test was used (Henseler, 2012; Cheah *et al*. 2020). This approach aims to determine whether the coefficients of the structural relationships differ significantly between two or more comparison groups (e.g., consumers with high and low brand love). The procedure involves estimating the PLS model independently for each group and then applying a bootstrapping procedure to calculate the statistical significance, without requiring parametric tests such as Student's t-test. As observed in Table 6, brand love was shown to moderate the effect of corporate reputation on satisfaction, the effect being higher for customers with lower BL. On the other hand, when the affections of the customers for the car brand were higher, the effects of corporate reputation on satisfaction were lower. Consequently, the satisfaction of consumers who have a lower intensity of car brand love seems to be driven more by corporate reputation. This is in line with the "love is blind" effect (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018). This effect suggests that consumers with a strong emotional attachment to a brand tend to overlook negative or less favorable brand attributes, thus relying less on cognitive evaluations when forming judgments. Our result suggests that when the emotional bond with the brand is weak, consumers place greater emphasis on external, more rational indicators such as corporate reputation to assess their sa-

tisfaction. In contrast, for those consumers who express high levels of brand love, the impact of corporate reputation on satisfaction diminishes substantially. These consumers appear to be less influenced by corporate signals and more guided by their affective attachment to the brand.

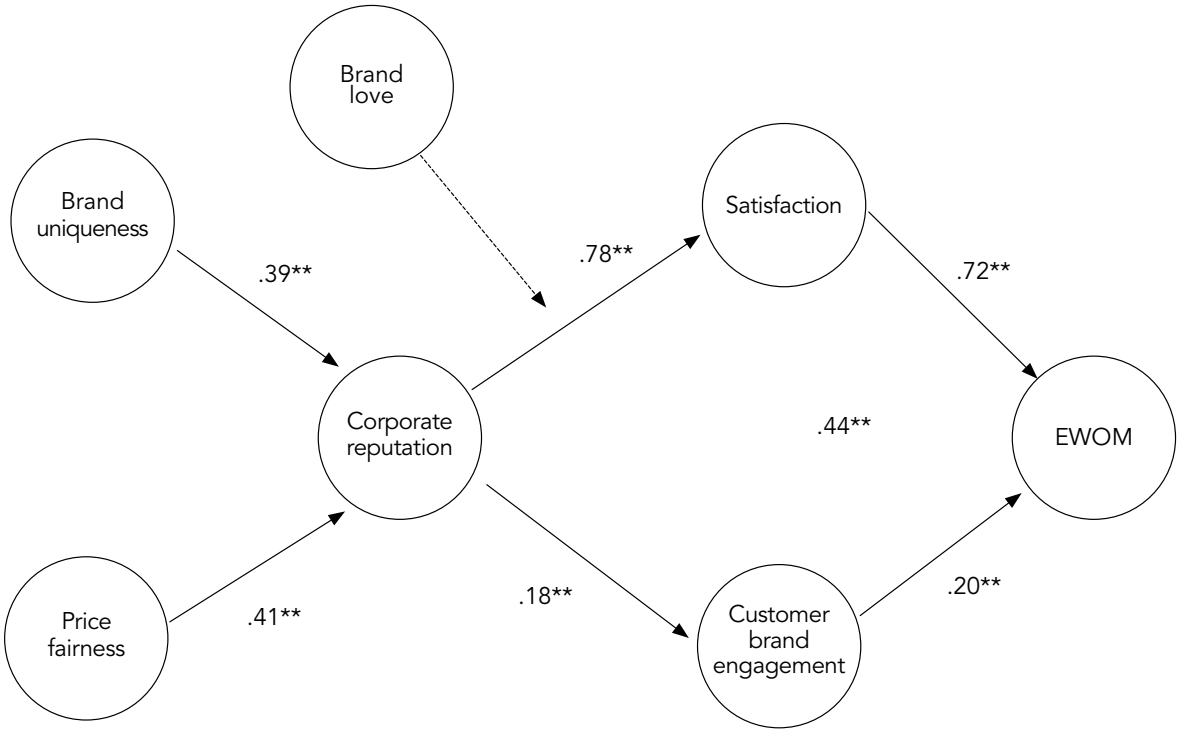
**Table 6**
*Moderation analysis of brand love*

| Relationship | BL High | BL Low | 2.5% | 97.5% | Permutation p value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RQ1 Reputation -> Satisfaction | 0.67 | 0.81 | -0.11 | .10 | .00* |

*Note.* *p<.01.

As Figure 2 illustrates the final estimation of .
the model.

**Figure 2**
*Estimated model*





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To conclude, the results of this research add valuable insight toward a deeper understanding the impact of corporate reputation on consumers' positive recommendations on social media (a core topic in marketing-focused studies). The study also enhances the understanding of the moderating role of brand love in the corporate reputation-satisfaction relationship.

## Conclusions

Recent emotions-focused studies have explained their role in increasing brand love. Understanding how corporate reputation generates satisfaction and brand engagement, and how it relates to positive eWOM, can assist auto dealerships in outperforming their competitors and meeting their customers´ expectations. Corporate reputation and customer brand engagement strongly affect customer´s behavioral decision-making. This research provides four theoretical contributions to relevant literature. In the first instance, we expand the knowledge of the relationships between corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, customer brand engagement, and eWOM, which have previously been the subject of inconclusive findings in the literature. Our assessment of the impact of corporate reputation on customer satisfaction and brand engagement provides new insights into cognitive dissonance theoryby showing that a strong corporate reputation can reduce cognitive dissonance experienced by customers when evaluating brand-related experiences with high involvement products. Specifically, our results suggest that when customers perceive a high corporate reputation, this perception increases the likelihood that their attitudes (satisfaction) and behaviors (brand engagement) with this perception, even in cases where the service encounter may be suboptimal. This suggests that corporate reputation acts as a cognitive anchor that facilitates the resolution of dissonance, thus fostering more stable and consistent evaluative and behavioral responses toward the car dealership.

Second, we explain the impact of consumers´ perceptions of the car dealership (brand uniqueness and perceived price fairness) on corporate reputation, supporting attribution theory. Third, we analyze the impact of customer satisfaction and CBE on the crucial behavioral intention of eWOM, especially since eWOM has emerged as a major source of product-related information for consumers. Fourth, given the limited research into brand love, this study examined the moderation role of brand love in the impact of corporate reputation on satisfaction. Brand consumer relationship-focused studies have substantially addressed the causes and consequences of brand love. The present study provides a real advance in the branding-focused literature by providing new knowledge/understanding about the boundary conditions of brand love's moderation role.

The results show that brand uniqueness positively affects a company's reputation. Automotive companies should work to make sure their brand stands out in a way that matches their core values. One way to do this is through innovation and technological advancement. For example, car dealerships can use new technologies like electric vehicles (EVs) to set themselves apart from competitors. In addition, car dealerships should ensure their prices are fair, both for their vehicles and their services (e.g. repairs). Customers should feel they are getting good value at the dealership, whether it's for the cost of a car or for parts and labor. This sense of fairness helps build a positive reputation, making customers believe the dealership follows ethical standards. Using technology like mobile apps to track services or offer better customer support can also enhance customer's experience.

Our study demonstrates that corporate reputation significantly affects customer satisfaction. Car dealerships can improve their reputation by offering customers honest, clear and transparent information, while focusing always on their current and future needs. Embracing technology and innovation will aid them in this process. For example, implementing digital tools like online car configurators or virtual reality showrooms allows customers to explore their options in a more interactive and convenient way. In addition, adopting innovations such as AI-powered chatbots for customer ser-

vice or predictive maintenance systems helps dealerships meet consumers´ expectations.

It was also shown that CBE has a strong influence on eWOM. Customers with strong engagement with brands will tend to share their experiences online. Car dealerships should invest in tools like mobile apps and connected car technology to help customers stay connected with the brand and share their positive experiences. Offering advanced features like personalized driving experiences and real-time data tracking can further increase engagement and encourage customers to recommend the brand to others. This increased engagement leads to more eWOM, as customers actively share their experiences and influence others.

This study is not without limitations, which also offers valuable directions for future research. First, its cross-sectional design captures a snapshot in time, providing only a limited view of the hypothesized relationships. To gain deeper insight into how these dynamics unfold, future research could adopt a longitudinal approach, offering more robust empirical validation. Second, the study's focus on a single automotive company and exclusively on new car purchases limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could test the model using data from second-hand car buyers, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer engagement across diverse market segments. Additionally, it would be beneficial to replicate the study across different companies and product categories to further validate and strengthen the generalizability of the results. Third, studies conducted in non-Western contexts have also emphasized the role of corporate reputation in shaping post-purchase outcomes. Therefore, we propose conducting a cross-cultural analysis to further explore the relationships between corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and brand engagement across different international markets.

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| **Muhammed S. AlNsour** | Conceptualization, data preservation, formal analysis, research, methodology, writing supervision. Original draft, writing. Review and editing. |
| **Carla Ruiz Mafé** | Conceptualization, data preservation, formal analysis, fundraising, research, methodology, writing supervision. Original draft, writing. Review and editing. |
| **Rafael Currás Pérez** | Conceptualization, data preservation, formal analysis, research, methodology, writing. Original draft, writing. Review and editing. |