

IMPACT OF GREEN TRUST ON GREEN BRAND EQUITY: THE ROLE OF GREEN PRICING, GREEN WORD OF MOUTH AND GREEN PERCEIVED QUALITY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The increasing global concern for environmental sustainability has placed significant emphasis on green branding in the hospitality sector. This study explores the impact of Green Trust on Green Brand Equity, with a specific focus on the Pakistani hospitality industry. The research examines how factors such as Green Pricing, Green Perceived Quality, and Green Word of Mouth influence Green Trust and, in turn, enhance Green Brand Equity. A quantitative research approach was adopted, using a structured questionnaire distributed to restaurant customers in major Pakistani cities, including Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad. A sample of 513 valid responses was analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses. The study establishes that Green Trust acts as a mediator between independent variables (Green Pricing, Green Perceived Quality, and Green Word of Mouth) and the dependent variable (Green Brand Equity). The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between Green Trust and Green Brand Equity, highlighting that customers are more likely to engage with and remain loyal to brands that demonstrate genuine environmental commitment. The study further confirms that Green Perceived Quality has the strongest impact on Green Trust, indicating that consumers prioritize the authenticity and effectiveness of eco-friendly initiatives when forming perceptions about a brand's trustworthiness. Additionally, Green Word of Mouth plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes, as positive recommendations from others reinforce the credibility of a brand's sustainability claims. While Green Pricing also affects Green Trust, its impact is relatively moderate, as many consumers remain price-sensitive despite their environmental concerns. The research contributes to the theoretical framework by integrating Signaling Theory and Social Identity Theory to explain how brands can leverage sustainability efforts to enhance consumer trust and loyalty. Practical implications suggest that businesses in the hospitality sector should focus on transparent and credible green marketing strategies, ensuring that sustainability claims align with actual practices to build lasting consumer trust. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the evolving consumer

mindset regarding environmental sustainability in hospitality. It highlights the importance of trust as a key driver of brand equity, urging hospitality businesses to adopt genuine and verifiable green initiatives to gain a competitive advantage in a sustainability-conscious market.

Introduction

The hospitality industry plays an integral role in the global economy, encompassing a wide range of sectors, including lodging, food and beverage services, travel and tourism, and entertainment. This multifaceted sector contributes significantly to economic growth by providing essential services to both local and international markets. It serves as a vital component of the tourism industry, offering accommodations ranging from luxury resorts to economical motels, as well as catering to diverse culinary and recreational preferences (George, 2021; A. Khan et al., 2021). Hospitality businesses are not merely service providers but also facilitators of cultural exchange, enabling interactions between people of diverse backgrounds while contributing to social cohesion and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Over the years, the industry has undergone remarkable transformations driven by globalization, technological advancements, and evolving consumer preferences. In this context, sustainability has emerged as a key focus, reflecting the growing awareness of environmental concerns and the need for responsible business practices (Calisto et al., 2021). Businesses in the sector are now under increasing pressure from consumers, local authorities, and advocacy groups to integrate eco-friendly and socially responsible practices into their operations. This includes adopting energy-efficient technologies, reducing waste, promoting sustainable tourism, and aligning business practices with principles of corporate social responsibility (Modica et al., 2020; Yousaf et al., 2021).

The concept of green hospitality, encompassing sustainable and eco-friendly practices, is increasingly becoming a cornerstone of the hospitality industry. By adopting measures that prioritize environmental, social, and financial sustainability, businesses can enhance their brand equity while addressing global environmental

challenges such as climate change and resource depletion (Lim, 2023). The transition toward green hospitality is not merely a trend but a necessity, driven by consumer preferences for environmentally responsible services and the competitive advantage it provides to businesses (Nguyen-Viet, 2022). Research has shown that sustainability initiatives in the hospitality sector influence consumer perceptions, fostering loyalty and enhancing the willingness to pay a premium for environmentally conscious services (Alyahia et al., 2024)(Martinez, 2015).

Pakistan's hospitality industry, enriched by its cultural heritage, diverse culinary landscape, and breathtaking natural beauty, has shown significant growth potential. Tourism is a vital contributor to the nation's economy, supported by government initiatives to simplify visa regulations and improve infrastructure (N. U. Khan et al., 2022). Over recent years, the country has seen increased investments in hotels and restaurants, driven by domestic and international interest in its cultural and scenic offerings. From upscale fine-dining establishments to traditional street food carts and dhabas, the restaurant sector reflects Pakistan's culinary diversity and evolving consumer demands (Asif et al., 2023). Moreover, the government's infrastructure development efforts, particularly in the northern regions, have positioned the country as a premier destination for adventure and cultural tourism, drawing visitors worldwide.

The interplay of sustainability, brand equity, and consumer trust forms the crux of this study. Central to this is the role of green brand equity, which encompasses consumer perceptions of a brand's commitment to environmental sustainability and influences their loyalty and purchasing decisions (Y.-S. Chen, 2010; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Similarly, green trust emerges as a pivotal factor, reflecting consumer confidence in a brand's environmental claims and its genuine

commitment to sustainability (Alyahia et al., 2024). Businesses that consistently demonstrate authenticity in their eco-friendly practices are better positioned to differentiate themselves in a competitive market, build stronger customer relationships, and enhance long-term profitability (Chua et al., 2024).

This research explores the multifaceted impact of sustainability and consumer perceptions on the hospitality sector, focusing on green brand equity, trust, perceived quality, and pricing strategies. By delving into these aspects, the study aims to provide actionable insights to help hospitality businesses navigate sustainability challenges while maximizing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, the findings will highlight how green practices can be leveraged as a strategic tool to enhance brand reputation and achieve a competitive edge in the rapidly evolving global economy.

Literature review

Sustainability has emerged as a pivotal factor shaping consumer perceptions in the hospitality industry, influencing loyalty and willingness to pay premium prices (Teng et al., 2012). The role of sustainable practices is emphasized by governments and communities, urging businesses to adopt environmentally conscious principles to mitigate the environmental pressures caused by the industry (De Grosbois, 2012; Xu & Gursoy, 2015). The integration of advanced technologies is identified as a critical pathway for hospitality businesses to modernize operations and foster sustainable frameworks (Kansakar et al., 2019). These advancements enable resource-efficient operations, enhanced customer experience, and improved alignment with global sustainability goals.

Brand equity, defined as the value a brand adds to its products, has garnered substantial attention in research. High brand equity enhances competitive advantage, loyalty, and customer trust (Kang & Hur, 2012; Yoo et al., 2000). Over time, the concept has evolved into "green brand equity," where environmental and social attributes are central to the brand's value proposition (Y.-S.

Chen, 2010). Green brand equity reflects a company's commitment to environmental sustainability, attracting eco-conscious customers and enhancing competitive differentiation (Akturan, 2018; Mourad & Serag Eldin Ahmed, 2012). Key components, such as perceived quality, brand awareness, and loyalty, serve as foundational dimensions of both traditional and green brand equity (Aaker & Equity, 1991; Taylor et al., 2007). Furthermore, businesses that integrate green values into their marketing strategies often experience improved consumer perceptions, resulting in enhanced market share and long-term profitability.

Trust and satisfaction are critical to consumer-brand relationships. Trust is a fundamental factor in fostering customer loyalty and sustaining long-term relationships. However, greenwashing practices, where brands falsely claim environmental responsibility, can severely damage trust (Y.-S. Chen & Chang, 2013). Perceived quality further strengthens consumer trust, with customers more likely to engage with products that they evaluate as reliable and beneficial (Zeithaml, 1988). Green perceived quality and green trust significantly influence purchase intentions and customer advocacy (Chi et al., 2009). Effective communication of sustainable practices through certification, eco-labels, and transparency helps mitigate skepticism and reinforces trust.

Word of mouth (WOM) plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable practices and products. Green WOM, driven by positive experiences with eco-friendly brands, is often more persuasive than traditional advertising (Hameed et al., 2022). Digital platforms and social media amplify the reach of green WOM, enabling brands to build broader networks of environmentally conscious consumers (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022). These channels allow brands to share sustainability efforts authentically, fostering deeper consumer engagement. In addition, green WOM not only influences individual purchasing decisions but also contributes to broader societal shifts toward sustainable consumption by normalizing eco-friendly behaviors.

Despite growing interest in green products, barriers such as high costs and consumer skepticism remain. Effective pricing strategies, transparent communication, and education about long-term environmental benefits are necessary to overcome these challenges (Tripathi & Pandey, 2018). Tiered pricing models and incentives, such as discounts for eco-conscious behavior or rewards programs, can encourage a wider audience to adopt green products. Businesses that align their practices with corporate social responsibility and sustainability gain a competitive edge while addressing these concerns (Karol & Mashood, 2018). Moreover, collaborative efforts among industry stakeholders to establish standardized green practices can further enhance consumer trust and adoption.

The literature underscores the interconnection between sustainability, brand equity, and consumer behavior. Companies that prioritize green branding and transparent sustainability practices are better positioned to build trust, enhance perceived value, and foster long-term consumer loyalty. Addressing barriers such as greenwashing and pricing concerns remains crucial for driving sustainable consumption patterns. Future research could explore the potential of emerging technologies, such as blockchain, to increase transparency and accountability in green marketing efforts. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the impact of green branding on consumer loyalty over time could provide deeper insights into its long-term efficacy.

Theoretical Framework

Sustainable development represents a holistic approach to societal progress, emphasizing the simultaneous achievement of economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection (Brundtland, 1987). It addresses the current generation's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. This triadic focus on environment, economy, and society-politics (Hasna, 2007) underscores the interconnected nature of human progress. The importance of this balance is further emphasized

by global strategies aimed at mitigating climate change and environmental degradation, as noted by (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2019). Organizations striving for sustainable development increasingly adopt green marketing strategies to ensure their environmental preservation efforts resonate across all marketing dimensions (Kinoti, 2011). These strategies serve as a foundation for sustainable growth by promoting environmentally friendly products and services (Garg, 2015). Green marketing aligns with consumer preferences for eco-friendly behaviors (Zimmer et al., 1994) including recycling, reducing waste, and supporting green products (McCarty & Shrum, 1994). These behaviors are integral to achieving "Climate Action," the 13th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which emphasizes the urgency of combating climate change through global initiatives and partnerships.

Theories Underpinning Green Marketing and Consumer Behavior

The theoretical foundation of green marketing integrates Signaling Theory and Social Identity Theory. Signaling Theory explains how brands demonstrate their commitment to sustainability through visible eco-friendly practices, reducing information asymmetry and fostering consumer trust (Karatepe et al., 2022). Social Identity Theory posits that consumers align with brands reflecting their values and self-concept, creating robust consumer-brand relationships (Chua et al., 2024). Furthermore, Attitude Theory highlights the cognitive, affective, and conative elements of consumer attitudes towards brands (Attri & Bhagwat, 2022). Frameworks such as the Tri-Component Attitude Model, Hierarchy of Effects Model, and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provide insights into how brands influence consumer perceptions and behaviors to enhance brand equity (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Petty et al., 1997). These theories reinforce the importance of emotional and psychological connections in shaping consumer loyalty and trust.

Modern Marketing and Brand Equity

Modern marketing principles emphasize customer-centricity, relationship marketing, storytelling, and digital engagement as pivotal elements in enhancing brand equity and trust (Hunt, 1993). By fostering long-term customer relationships and prioritizing positive brand experiences, companies can strengthen consumer loyalty and advocacy (Arghashi et al., 2021). Digital platforms and content marketing are vital tools for engaging audiences, amplifying brand messaging, and building trust (Majeed et al., 2021).

Unified Theory of Brand Equity

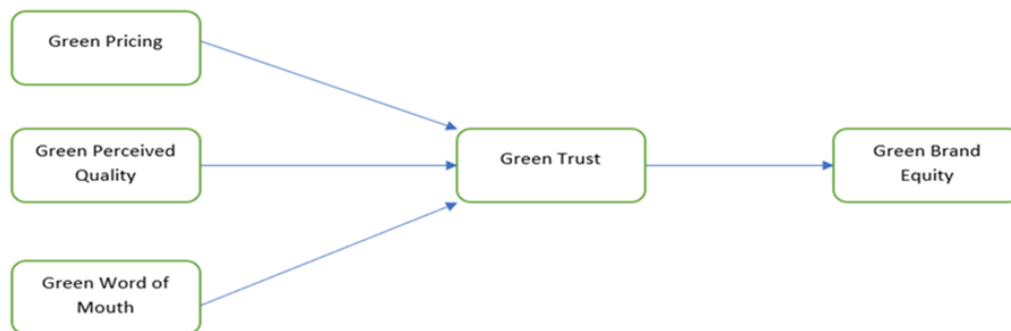
The Unified Theory of Brand Equity (UTBE) synthesizes diverse perspectives to provide a holistic understanding of brand value creation. Models such as the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, Brand Value Chain, and Brand

Asset Valuator (BAV) elucidate the dynamics of consumer perceptions, brand associations, and strategic marketing activities (Davcik et al., 2015). These models emphasize the sequential and multi-dimensional aspects of brand development, from awareness to loyalty and advocacy.

Commitment-Trust Theory

Trust and commitment are central to brand equity and consumer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment-Trust Theory suggests that strong emotional attachment and loyalty contribute significantly to brand equity. Consumers with high brand commitment are more likely to make repeat purchases and engage in positive word-of-mouth recommendations, reinforcing the brand's market position and long-term success.

Conceptual Framework:



Research Hypotheses:

H1: Green Trust Positively Influences Green Brand Equity in the Pakistani Hospitality Sector

Green Trust refers to the consumer's belief that a brand is genuinely committed to environmentally sustainable practices, rather than simply making superficial claims for marketing purposes (Y.-S. Chen, 2010). Green Brand Equity reflects the value that consumers assign to a brand based on their perceptions of its eco-friendly attributes and actions. In the context of Pakistan's hospitality industry, this relationship is particularly significant, as consumers are becoming

increasingly discerning about sustainability in services, including eco-friendly accommodations, energy-efficient practices, and waste reduction efforts. Previous studies in the green branding literature suggest that consumer trust in a brand's sustainability efforts directly correlates with stronger brand equity (Deniz & Onder, 2017). For instance, when a hospitality brand is transparent about its environmental practices, such as using renewable energy, offering organic food, or reducing water usage, consumers who trust the brand are more likely to feel a sense of loyalty and prefer it over competitors. This trust fosters a

positive perception of the brand, leading to increased customer loyalty, willingness to pay a premium, and long-term retention. In Pakistan, where greenwashing is a concern among consumers (Tarabieh, 2021), building authentic Green Trust is crucial for establishing strong Green Brand Equity. Brands that successfully communicate their green credentials and practices will be rewarded with greater consumer confidence and enhanced brand value.

H2: Green Pricing Positively Influences Green Trust Within the Context of the Pakistani Hospitality Sector

Green Pricing refers to the practice of charging a premium for products or services that are environmentally sustainable or eco-friendly. In the hospitality industry, Green Pricing could manifest as higher charges for environmentally friendly rooms, organic food options, or services that support sustainability, such as water-saving technologies or carbon offset programs. Consumers' perceptions of Green Pricing are often influenced by the belief that the premium paid for such services reflects the actual costs of sustainable practices and ethical production methods. This hypothesis suggests that Green Pricing can positively influence Green Trust by signaling a brand's authenticity and commitment to sustainability. If consumers perceive the price as justified by the environmental benefits or superior quality associated with green offerings, they are more likely to trust the brand. In Pakistan, where the hospitality sector is developing and consumer awareness of environmental sustainability is evolving, Green Pricing could play a dual role: serving as an indicator of a brand's environmental commitment and a tangible marker of the perceived value of green practices. However, if consumers perceive the price premium as unjustified or merely a marketing ploy (i.e., greenwashing), trust can be eroded. Therefore, effective communication of the rationale for Green Pricing is critical to building Green Trust (Lien et al., 2015).

H3: Green Word of Mouth Positively Influences Green Trust Among Consumers in the Pakistani Hospitality Sector

Green Word of Mouth (GWOM) refers to the informal exchange of information about a brand's green practices or eco-friendly offerings, typically shared through social interactions, either in person or via digital platforms such as social media, reviews, and forums. Green Trust is enhanced when consumers receive recommendations or positive feedback from peers regarding a brand's commitment to sustainability. This peer influence is often seen as more credible than brand-generated communication, e.g., advertising or press releases, because it comes from sources that consumers consider more reliable and unbiased. (Barreda et al., 2015). In Pakistan's hospitality sector, where personal networks and online reviews play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, Green Word of Mouth can significantly influence consumer trust. For instance, if a guest at a hotel shares a positive experience with the hotel's eco-friendly practices, such as its use of solar energy or waste management systems, other potential customers may be more inclined to trust the hotel's sustainability efforts. This creates a positive feedback loop in which Green Word of Mouth builds Green Trust, further enhancing the brand's reputation and encouraging new customers to choose the brand for its sustainability credentials. (Zainol et al., 2016)

H4: Green Perceived Quality Positively Influences Green Trust Among Consumers in Pakistan's Hospitality Sector

Green Perceived Quality refers to the consumer's assessment of the overall quality of a brand's green products or services, which includes factors such as environmental impact, sustainability, and performance (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). In hospitality, this might refer to guests' perceptions of the quality of green amenities such as eco-friendly rooms, organic food options, or sustainable tourism practices. If consumers perceive that these green offerings meet or exceed their expectations for both quality and

sustainability, they are more likely to trust the brand's environmental claims. In the Pakistani context, where consumers are becoming more environmentally conscious, the Green Perceived Quality of services directly impacts their Green Trust. A brand that provides high-quality eco-friendly products or services that genuinely improve the guest experience is likely to gain greater consumer trust. For instance, if a hotel offers eco-friendly rooms with superior air quality, water-conservation measures, and energy-efficient appliances, consumers are more likely to believe the brand is committed to sustainability. This increased trust, in turn, leads to a positive evaluation of the brand's overall Green Brand Equity (Bigné et al., 2005).

H5: Green Trust Mediates the Relationship Between Green Pricing and Green Brand Equity in the Pakistani Hospitality Sector

Green Trust is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between Green Pricing and Green Brand Equity, meaning that the influence of Green Pricing on Green Brand Equity occurs through the consumer's trust in the brand's green claims. While Green Pricing can signal a brand's environmental commitment, it is only effective in building Green Brand Equity if consumers trust that the brand's green initiatives justify the premium price (Gregg & Walczak, 2010). In Pakistan, where sustainability is still a relatively new concept in the hospitality industry, the perception of fair and transparent Green Pricing plays a critical role in shaping consumer trust. Once trust is established, it leads to a positive evaluation of the brand, thereby enhancing its Green Brand Equity. Without trust, even a well-priced green offering may fail to increase brand equity, as consumers may question its authenticity or perceive it as greenwashing.

H6: Green Trust Mediates the Relationship Between Green Word of Mouth and Green Brand Equity in the Pakistani Hospitality Sector

In this hypothesis, Green Trust mediates the relationship between Green Word of Mouth (WOM) and Green Brand Equity. The idea is that

the positive WOM about a brand's green practices enhances consumer trust, which in turn strengthens the brand's equity. Positive Green WOM, particularly from friends, family, and social media, acts as social proof of a brand's sustainability efforts. When consumers hear firsthand accounts of a brand's successful green initiatives, such as using energy-efficient systems or minimizing waste, it builds their trust in the brand's commitment to environmental sustainability. This trust, in turn, influences the brand's perceived value and reputation, ultimately enhancing its Green Brand Equity (Severi et al., 2014).

H7: Green Trust Mediates the Relationship Between Green Perceived Quality and Green Brand Equity

Green Trust is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between Green Perceived Quality and Green Brand Equity. The rationale is that if consumers perceive a brand's green products or services as high-quality, it strengthens their trust in the brand's environmental commitments. This trust, in turn, enhances Green Brand Equity. For instance, if a hotel offers high-quality eco-friendly rooms, consumers are more likely to believe in the brand's sustainability efforts, increasing their loyalty and preference for the brand. This trust leads to greater brand equity, as consumers associate the brand with both high quality and strong environmental commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Methodology

This study was conducted over a specified period and used a correlational design. Primary research methods were used, with data gathered through questionnaires adapted from previous studies to ensure the generalizability of the responses to the particular scenario. These questionnaires were distributed via WhatsApp to the target participants. A cluster convenience sampling method was employed to collect the data (Hair et al., 2016). The dependent variable in this study is Green Brand Equity, while the independent variables include Green Pricing, Green Word of

Mouth, and Green Perceived Quality, with Green Brand Trust acting as the mediator.

After the data were collected, statistical tests were conducted to examine the hypotheses. PLS-SEM was used to analyze the structural relationships between latent and observed variables.

A key feature of PLS-SEM is determining an appropriate sample size. For this study, a sample size of 513 was selected based on the population size, using (Krejcie, 1970) table to guide the decision. This study was quantitative in nature, with primary data being collected through electronically distributed adapted questionnaires. The responses gathered were then analyzed statistically by converting them into numerical data. According to (Sekaran & Bougie, 2003) Surveys are an effective tool for working with a large, geographically diverse sample population.

A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, with 566 responses received, representing a response rate of 70.75%. Of these, 513 responses (90.63%) were considered usable and valid. The demographic analysis of the respondents showed that females represented 44.44% (228), while

males accounted for 55.56% (285). The respondents' qualifications were: matriculation 13, intermediate 9, bachelor's 382, master's 107, and doctorate 2. The population for this study comprises restaurant customers from major cities in Pakistan. To achieve the study's goals, an appropriate sample size is selected to represent the population. Due to practical limitations in reaching the entire population, a sample is chosen to generalize the results. A larger sample size ensures the validity and accuracy of the findings, but it may also introduce duplication. In this study, 800 questionnaires were distributed, with the expectation that a 100% return rate would not be achievable. After four weeks, 566 responses were received, representing a response rate of 70.75%. The data analysis process consists of two phases: descriptive analysis and multivariate statistical analysis. The first phase involves profiling the respondents, while the second phase uses Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to address the research objectives, with data analysis conducted using Smart PLS software (Rahman & Arifin, 2022).

Results

Table 1: Construct Reliability and Validity

	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Rho_A</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>	<i>Average Extracted (AVE)</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<i>GBE</i>	0.757	0.773	0.847	0.583	
<i>GBT</i>	0.735	0.756	0.834	0.558	
<i>GP</i>	0.777	0.794	0.846	0.526	
<i>GPQ</i>	0.782	0.796	0.851	0.534	
<i>GWOM</i>	0.818	0.824	0.880	0.648	

All Cronbach's Alpha values are approximately 0.8, which indicates an excellent level of internal consistency. Rho A is used to assess the strength of the relationship between two variables, with a single value ranging from -1 to +1. A positive correlation indicates a positive relationship, a negative correlation signifies a negative relationship, and zero indicates no relationship. This study demonstrates a positive relationship between the variables, as all values are +1. Composite reliability, or construct reliability, is considered acceptable when the value is 0.70 or higher, indicating good internal consistency of the data (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This criterion is met in the present study, as all values exceed 0.7. An Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.5 or higher indicates that the measurement items effectively capture the characteristics of each research variable. According to (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), the AVE for a latent variable should be greater than the squared correlations between the latent variables. In this study, all AVE values exceed 0.5, as shown in the table above.

Table 2: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>VIF</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>
<i>GP</i>	1.509	0.6624
<i>GPQ</i>	1.616	0.6189
<i>GWOM</i>	1.79	0.5585

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was examined through regression results using Smart PLS 3. VIF measures how much the regression coefficients are inflated when the independent variables are not linearly correlated. Tolerance, on the other hand, indicates the extent to which the variability of a specified predictor variable is not explained by other independent variables in the model for each construct (Pallant, 2020). A VIF of 1 indicates no multicollinearity among the factors, while a VIF greater than 1 suggests moderate multicollinearity among the independent variables. A VIF value between 5 and 10 indicates a high correlation that could pose challenges. According to the guidelines, VIF values for all variables should

ideally be below 10 (O'Brien & Sharkey Scott, 2012; Pallant, 2020). If the VIF exceeds 10, multicollinearity is likely among the regression coefficients. Similarly, the tolerance value should not exceed 10 or fall below 0.10 (Hair et al., 2010) and independent variables with a tolerance value under 0.1 should be removed (O'Brien & Sharkey Scott, 2012). Based on the VIF values, all variables had VIFs between 1.509 and 1.79, which is within the acceptable range, and tolerance values were greater than 0.10, indicating that no multicollinearity was present. The output from PLS-SEM, shown in Table 4.10 below, confirms the absence of multicollinearity among the variables.

Table 3: Discriminant validity

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	<i>GBE_</i>	<i>GBT</i>	<i>GP</i>	<i>GPQ</i>	<i>GWOM</i>
<i>GBE_</i>					
<i>GBT</i>	0.725				
<i>GP</i>	0.638	0.787			
<i>GPQ</i>	0.825	0.846	0.722		
<i>GWOM</i>	0.844	0.677	0.580	0.829	

The discriminant validity approach means that latent variables that constitute distinctive theoretical standards are statistically distinctive. The HTMT is a degree of similarity among latent variables. The HTMT was developed to address the insensitivity of the (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)

and cross-loading criterion; HTMT values close to 1 indicate a lack of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). To confirm discriminant validity, all HTMT index values should be less than 0.90 (Chien & Chi, 2019).

Table 4: R-Square

	<i>R Square</i>
<i>GBE_</i>	0.308
<i>GBT</i>	0.531

R² is an important part of a structural model evaluation. R² value of 0.25 is considered weak,

whereas 0.50 is moderate, and a value of 0.70 is referred to as a strong coefficient of determination

(Hair, 2014). This study meets the above-mentioned criteria by deriving R² of Green Brand Equity equal to 0.531 and of Green Brand Trust

equal to 0.308, representing a strong coefficient of determination (Aziz et al., 2019).

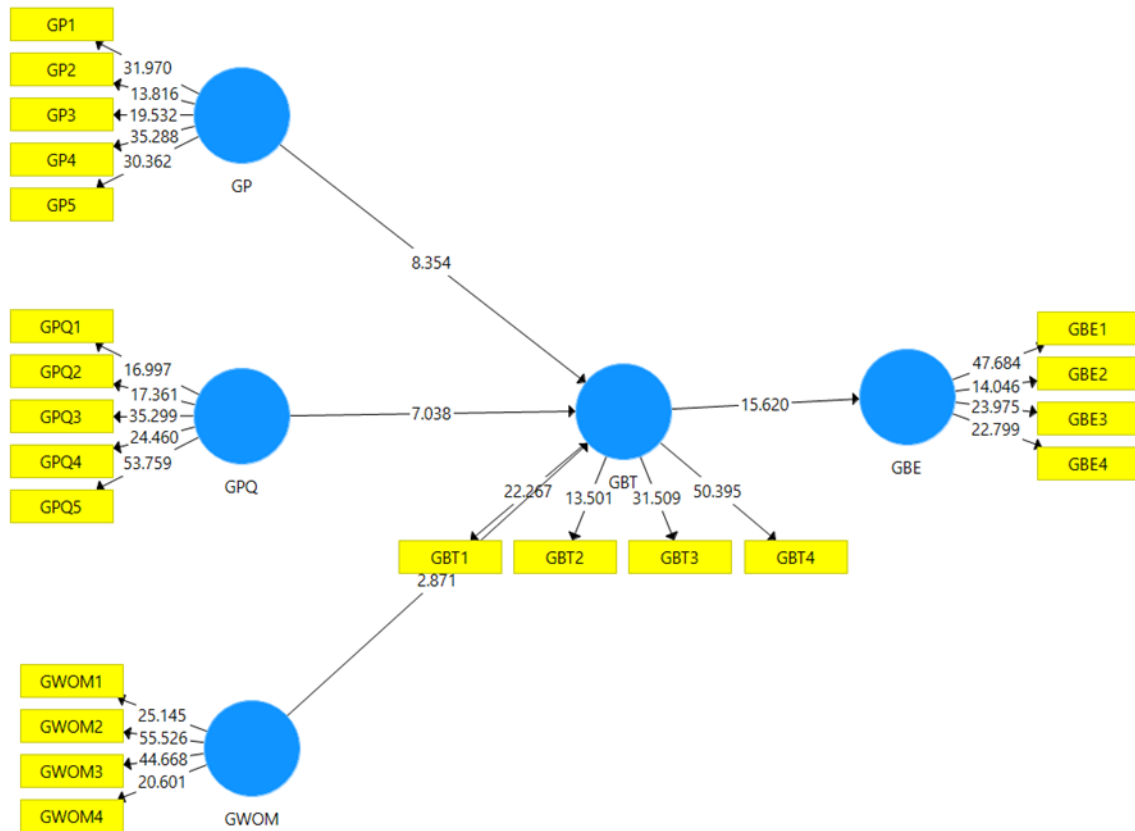


Table 5: Regression Analysis

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
<i>GBT → GBE</i>	0.555	0.555	0.036	15.506	0.000
<i>GP → GBT</i>	0.340	0.336	0.039	8.701	0.000
<i>GPQ → GBT</i>	0.381	0.386	0.053	7.207	0.000
<i>GWOM → GBT</i>	0.128	0.128	0.043	2.981	0.003

The table above presents the results of the regression analysis for the model. Hypothesis H1 indicates a significant relationship between Green Brand Trust (GBT) and Green Brand Equity (GBE), with a significance level of less than 1%, confirming that the hypothesis is supported. The results show that the relationship

between GBT and Green Pricing (GP) is also significant at the 1% level, supporting the acceptance of hypothesis H2. Hypothesis H3, which examines the relationship between GBT and Green Word of Mouth (GWOM), is significant at the 1% level, so it is accepted. This suggests that GWOM, as an independent variable,

may influence Green Brand Trust. Similarly, hypothesis H4, which explores the relationship between GBT and Green Perceived Quality

(GPQ), is significant at the 1% level, thereby confirming its acceptance.

Table 6: Specific Indirect Effects

	<i>Original Sample (O)</i>	<i>Sample Mean (M)</i>	<i>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</i>	<i>T Statistics (/O/STDEV/)</i>	<i>P Values</i>
<i>GP → GBT → GBE</i>	0.189	0.187	0.026	7.165	0.000
<i>GPQ → GBT → GBE</i>	0.211	0.214	0.030	7.150	0.000
<i>GWOM → GBT → GBE</i>	0.071	0.072	0.026	2.722	0.007

Hypothesis H5 indicates that GBT significantly mediates the relationship between GBE and Green Pricing (GP) at the 1% significance level, leading to its acceptance. Hypothesis H6 indicates that GBT significantly mediates the relationship between GBE and Green Word of Mouth (GWOM) at a significance level of 1%, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. Similarly, hypothesis H7 indicates that GBT significantly mediates the relationship between GBE and Green Perceived Quality (GPQ) at the 1% significance level, supporting its acceptance.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study is to examine the mediating role of Green Trust between Green Pricing, Green Perceived Quality, Green Word of Mouth, and Green Brand Equity in Pakistan's hospitality sector.

Relationship of Green Pricing with Green Brand Equity

The study highlights the association between green pricing and green brand equity. Green pricing plays a pivotal role in shaping consumers' perceptions of a brand's environmental commitment, influencing overall brand equity. Brands that price their products higher due to environmentally friendly features such as sustainable sourcing, reduced packaging, and energy-efficient production are often viewed as more responsible, which contributes positively to their brand equity. Consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that align with their environmental values, leading to increased trust

and loyalty, which directly enhances the brand's equity (D'Souza et al., 2007). This relationship emphasizes that green pricing is not just a cost but a strategic tool for reinforcing a brand's environmental image and fostering stronger connections with eco-conscious consumers. Therefore, the positive relationship between green pricing and green brand equity is evident, as it helps position the brand as a leader in sustainability and corporate social responsibility. The findings of this study are aligned with the study results of (D'Souza et al., 2007) and (Mathew & Jose, 2022)

Relationship of Green Perceived Quality with Green Brand Equity

This section delves into the relationship between Green Perceived Quality and Green Brand Equity. Green Perceived Quality refers to how consumers evaluate the environmental benefits of a brand's products or services, including sustainability, eco-friendliness, and overall environmental impact. High perceived green quality, such as using biodegradable materials or energy-efficient processes, enhances a brand's image and establishes its environmental credibility. As consumers increasingly favor products with eco-friendly attributes, a strong perception of green quality significantly contributes to the brand's equity. The positive correlation between Green Perceived Quality and Green Brand Equity highlights that when consumers perceive a product as environmentally superior, their loyalty increases, and they are more likely to recommend the brand to others (Y. Chen & Chang, 2012).

This elevates the brand's status and strengthens its competitive position in the market. The findings of this study are aligned with the previous studies (Chang & Chen, 2014; Ng et al., 2014).

Relationship of Green Word of Mouth with Green Brand Equity

The section explores the influence of Green Word of Mouth on Green Brand Equity. Green Word of Mouth refers to the informal communication and recommendations that consumers make about a brand's environmental practices. Positive Green Word of Mouth, such as sharing experiences about a brand's sustainability initiatives, can significantly enhance the brand's reputation and increase its perceived value. Consumers trust the opinions of friends, family, and peers more than traditional advertising, and when these conversations center on a brand's environmental efforts, they strengthen the brand's green equity. The study indicates that Green Word of Mouth has a strong positive relationship with Green Brand Equity, as it fosters brand loyalty, enhances brand image, and attracts new customers who value sustainability (Pauli et al., 2023). The more consumers engage in Green Word of Mouth, the more they reinforce the brand's green attributes, leading to greater trust and connection with the brand. The findings of this study are aligned with the results of (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022; Hue, 2024).

Mediating Effect of Green Brand Trust on Green Brand Equity

The mediating role of Green Brand Trust in the relationship between Green Pricing, Green Perceived Quality, Green Word of Mouth, and Green Brand Equity is significant. Trust is a core element in shaping consumer behavior, especially in the context of environmental sustainability. Green Brand Trust refers to the confidence that consumers place in a brand's environmental claims and actions. The study suggests that Green Brand Trust mediates the relationships between the independent variables, i.e., Green Pricing, Green Perceived Quality, and Green Word of Mouth, and Green Brand Equity. When consumers trust a brand's sustainability efforts, they are more likely to view its products as higher quality, more worth their premium price, and more deserving of positive word of mouth. In this regard, Green Brand Trust serves as a bridge, enhancing the impact of Green Pricing, Green Perceived Quality, and Green Word of Mouth on Green Brand Equity. The results indicate that while each of these factors positively influences Green Brand Equity, the presence of strong Green Brand Trust amplifies this effect, leading to higher consumer loyalty and a stronger overall brand perception. The findings of this study are aligned with the study results of (Ha, 2020) and (Y.-S. Chen, 2010).

Table 7: Table for Hypothesis Testing

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Decision</i>
H1	Green Trust positively influences Green Brand Equity in the Pakistani hospitality sector.	Significant
H2	Green Pricing positively influences Green Trust in the Pakistani hospitality sector.	Significant
H3	Green Word of Mouth positively influences Green Trust among consumers in the Pakistani hospitality sector.	Significant
H4	Green Perceived Quality positively influences Green Trust among consumers in Pakistan's hospitality sector.	Significant
H5	Green Trust mediates the relationship between Green Pricing and Green Brand Equity in the Pakistani hospitality sector.	Significant
H6	Green Trust mediates the relationship between Green Word of Mouth and Green Brand Equity in the Pakistani hospitality sector.	Significant

Conclusion

This study investigates the impact of various green marketing elements green pricing, green perceived quality, and green word of mouth on green brand equity within the hospitality sector of Pakistan. The role of green brand trust as a mediating factor has also been explored in this research. By focusing on the hospitality industry in Pakistan, this study fills a gap in the literature where previous research has primarily concentrated on other sectors, such as banking and insurance. The study reveals that green pricing, when perceived as fair and environmentally justified, enhances consumer trust, thereby strengthening green brand equity. Additionally, perceived green quality significantly impacts consumer trust, thereby reinforcing brand loyalty and enhancing brand equity. Furthermore, the influence of green word of mouth has been shown to play a crucial role in shaping trust in green brands, thereby directly contributing to overall brand equity. The mediating role of green brand trust is significant in connecting green pricing, green perceived quality, and green word of mouth with green brand equity. The findings suggest that trust in a brand's environmental claims amplifies the impact of its green initiatives, enhancing consumer loyalty and strengthening the brand's position in the competitive hospitality market. Overall, the study contributes valuable insights for hospitality businesses in Pakistan to improve their green marketing strategies by focusing on pricing, quality perceptions, and leveraging positive word-of-mouth to build trust with eco-conscious consumers.

Practical Applications

The findings of this study have practical implications for Pakistan's hospitality industry, emphasizing the importance of integrating green practices to enhance brand equity. Businesses should adopt balanced green pricing strategies to make eco-friendly options more accessible, prioritize sustainable practices to improve

perceived quality, and leverage customer advocacy through green word-of-mouth initiatives. Transparent communication and certifications can strengthen trust in green brands, fostering consumer loyalty. Employee training programs can further ensure the consistent implementation of green practices. For future research, expanding the scope to other industries, exploring the role of emerging technologies like blockchain and IoT in fostering green trust, and conducting longitudinal studies can provide deeper insights into the dynamics of green brand equity. Additionally, investigating regional and cultural variations and assessing the impact of government policies could inform more comprehensive strategies to promote sustainability in the hospitality sector.

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