
THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND AWARENESS, ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH, AND BRAND TRUST ON BRAND PREFERENCE FOR RICHEESE FACTORY AMONG GEN Z IN SURABAYA

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Abstract

The fast-food industry continues to experience rapid growth, especially with changes in consumption patterns among Gen Z that prioritize convenience and practicality. Richeese Factory, as a local brand, faces challenges in enhancing consumer preferences amidst intense competition. This research aims to examine the influence of Brand Awareness, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust on Brand Preference for Richeese Factory among Gen Z in Surabaya City. The research method used is quantitative with a sample of 98 Gen Z respondents aged 17-27 who have purchased or consumed Richeese Factory at least once. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling, and the data are analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Square (PLS). The results show that Brand Awareness, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust have a positive and significant effect on Brand Preference. This finding highlights the importance of marketing strategies that focus on increasing Brand Awareness, managing Electronic Word of Mouth, and maintaining Brand Trust. This research also contributes to the understanding of marketing in the fast-food industry and opens opportunities for further research with other variables and expanding the geographical scope.

Keywords: Brand Awareness, Electronic Word of Mouth, Brand Trust, Brand Preference

INTRODUCTION

The business sector continues to experience rapid development, particularly in the food industry. The intense competition in the food industry poses a challenge that requires market understanding and sensitivity in order to compete effectively. The growth of the food industry in Indonesia shows a positive trend. GAPMMI predicts that the food and beverage industry will grow by around 6% by 2025, up from the target of 5–5.5% in 2024 (Antara, 2024). According to a report from CNBC Indonesia, the fast-food industry is projected to reach a value of approximately USD 55.25 billion in 2024 and grow to USD 103.76 billion by 2029, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.43% (Puspadini, 2024).

Lifestyle changes, especially in big cities like Surabaya, are pushing people to eat out. According to the 2020 Population Census data from the Central Statistics Agency, Generation Z, which consists of individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is the main segment in this trend. Fast food is the most dominant choice at 63% compared to other categories like home-cooked meals or healthy food (Populix, 2023). A Jakpat survey in December 2024 also showed that 49% of Gen Z consumers, it 1–2 times a week, 24% 3–4 times a week, and 12% daily (GoodStats, 2025).

Richeese Factory is a local brand from PT Richeese Kuliner Indonesia, offering fried chicken dishes with cheese and spicy barbecue sauce. Despite having more than 238 outlets by 2023 and starting to expand into international markets, Richeese Factory still ranks below McDonald's and KFC in the preference of young Indonesians. According to data published by GoodStats in September 2022, Richeese Factory was only chosen by 9.8% of young people, compared to McDonald's (46.6%) and KFC (30.7%). The Top Brand Index also recorded a fluctuating trend for Richeese Factory at 4.90% (2020), 5.90% (2021), dropping to 3.70% (2023), and rising to 6.70% (2024), indicating the importance of a strategy to enhance Brand Preference.

Brand Preference is the tendency of consumers to choose one brand over others (Wardhana, 2024). Enhancing Brand Preference can be achieved through a Brand Awareness strategy. Brand Awareness is the ability of buyers to distinguish or recall a particular brand based on a specific product category (Aaker, 2020). High Brand Awareness positively contributes to purchase decisions by increasing familiarity, trust, and consumer preference (Pramayanti, 2024). High Brand Awareness can increase consumer attention to reviews or ratings of a brand. Electronic Word of Mouth becomes a key factor in digital marketing, where consumers are more likely to trust opinions from other users who have previously tried the product rather than information conveyed through traditional advertising (Amin & Yanti, 2021). This is relevant to the critical behavior of Gen Z, who seek reviews before making purchases (Syafika et al., 2025). Positive Electronic Word of Mouth can influence Brand Preference, while negative Electronic Word of Mouth has the opposite effect.

Richeese Factory had faced problems due to a viral video showing a cockroach found in the 'Pink Lava' drink, which impacted the brand's image on social media (TikTok, 2025). One of the affected aspects is Brand Trust, which is the belief and expectation of consumers regarding a brand's ability to fulfill promises and expectations. Consumers who have trust in a brand tend to make repeat purchases, recommend the brand to others, and show higher loyalty to that brand (Wardhana, 2024). Brand Trust plays a crucial role in building long-term relationships as it creates a sense of safety and assurance regarding the brand's

reliability. Additionally, Brand Trust also plays a role in forming Brand Preference, as a high level of trust makes consumers more likely to choose one brand over another (Falah et al., 2022). Therefore, Richeese Factory needs to rebuild consumer trust to create a competitive advantage and strengthen long-term relationships with its consumers.

Several studies have discussed the influence of Brand Awareness, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust on Brand Preference across various industries. Research (Rodhiyah, 2020) found the influence of Brand Awareness in Islamic banking, research (Dam, 2020) showed that Brand Trust has an impact in the smartphone industry, and study (Azhar, 2021) proved the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth as well as Brand Awareness in the cinema industry. However, not many have examined all three factors simultaneously in the fast-food product sector. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by examining the influence of Brand Awareness, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust on Brand Preference for Richeese Factory among Gen Z in the city of Surabaya.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Brand Awareness

According to Aaker (2020) in (Gazali & Ekawanto, 2024) states that Brand Awareness is the ability of potential buyers to recognize or recall a particular brand as part of a relevant product category. Brand Awareness aims to ensure that the brand remains in the consumer's mind when needs arise, thus becoming a consideration in the decision-making process (Firmansyah, 2019) in (Arianty & Andira, 2021). A high level of Brand Awareness provides a competitive advantage because consumers are more likely to choose brands, they are already familiar with. The indicators of Brand Awareness according to Keller (in Hendrayanti & Terini, 2021) are: Recall, Recognition, Purchase, Consumption.

H1: It is suspected that Brand Awareness has a positive effect on Brand Preference for Richeese Factory among Gen Z in Surabaya City.

Electronic Word of Mouth

Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) is a form of communication between consumers that allows them to share information, provide reviews, and recommend products to other consumers based on their experiences using the products (Wintang & Pasharibu, 2021). Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) is designed to encourage consumers to share their experiences related to the company's products or services in various formats, such as writing, images, or videos (Kotler and Keller, 2016) in (Lili, 2021). Messages on Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) can reduce the risks and uncertainties faced by consumers when purchasing goods or services (Sualang et al., 2023). The indicators of Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) according to Goyette et al. (2010:11) in (Luviana et al., 2022) are: Intensity, Valence of Opinion, Content.

H2: It is suspected that Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) has a positive effect on Brand Preference for Richeese Factory among Gen Z in Surabaya City.

Brand Trust

According to Vaniara & Pramono (2022), Brand Trust is the level of trust that customers have in a product when they believe that the product can meet their expectations. Brand Trust refers to the feeling of comfort experienced by customers when interacting with a brand, with the confidence that the brand can be trusted and cares for the well-being of its

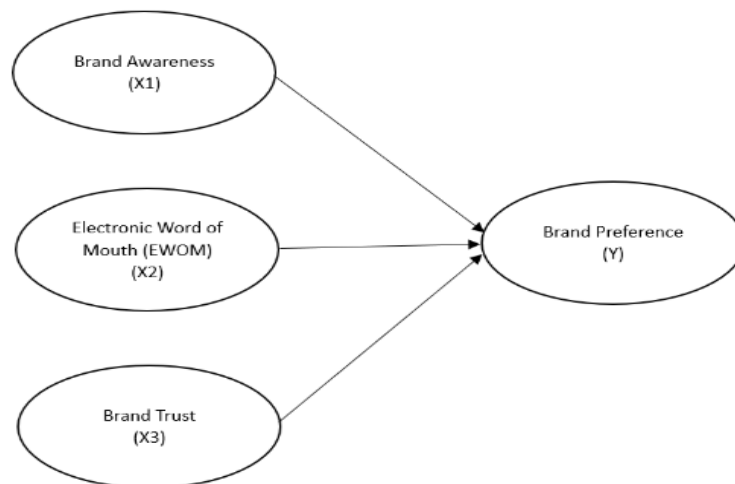
customers (Sahin et al., 2011) in (Angelina & Supriyono, 2024). Chae et al. (2020) show that Brand Trust stems from the positive experiences that customers have with the brand, which contributes to the formation of a positive image and customer loyalty. The indicators of Brand Trust, according to Laksono & Suryadi (2020) in (Zulfansyah & Dermawan, 2024) are: Brand Credibility, Brand Competence, Brand Goodness, and Brand Reputation.

H3: It is suspected that Brand Trust has a positive effect on Brand Preference for Richeese Factory among Gen Z in Surabaya City.

Brand Preference

Brand Preference is a relative tendency of an individual to choose and use a certain brand compared to other brands, even when there are equivalent alternative options (Rofiah et al., 2022). Brand Preference is a form of evaluation conducted by customers towards a brand. This condition indicates the tendency of buyers to favor a particular brand due to a positive perception or sentiment towards it (Falah et al., 2022). Wardhana (2024) explains that Brand Preference encompasses several important aspects, which include consumer awareness of the brand, emotional or cognitive connection with the brand, perception of product quality, and the level of consumer loyalty. According to Chang et al. (2008) in (Flowerensia, 2024), the indicators of Brand Preference are: Brand is more preferred, Brand is more sought after, Brand is superior.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Developed by Researcher, 2025

Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a quantitative study. The sampling technique was conducted using non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling approach. According to Sugiyono (2020), purposive sampling is a method of selecting samples from data sources based on certain criteria or considerations. In this study, the criteria for respondents are as follows: (1) Residing in Surabaya, (2) Aged 17 - 27 years, (3) Have purchased or consumed Richeese Factory at least once. The total sample used for the research was 98 respondents, based on

the calculation by Hair et al. (2021), which is 14 indicators x 5-10. Data collection was carried out through the distribution of online questionnaires using Google Forms as the main instrument, while secondary data was obtained from literature, journals, and electronic media. The types of data used include primary and secondary data, with measurements of variables using a 1-5 Likert scale indicating (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method, which includes evaluation of the outer model (to assess validity and reliability) as well as the inner model (to test the research hypotheses).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Outer Model

The measurement model in this study uses exogenous variables measured through reflective indicators, namely Brand Awareness (X1), Electronic Word of Mouth (X2), and Brand Trust (X3). Meanwhile, the endogenous variable in this study is Brand Preference (Y). One way to measure the validity of the indicators is by referring to the output of the outer loadings table, which involves paying attention to the factor loading values.

Table 1.
Outer Loadings (Mean, STDEV, T-Values)

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistic
X1.1 <- (X1)	0.801	0.793	0.062	12.886
X1.2 <- (X1)	0.754	0.747	0.064	11.850
X1.3 <- (X1)	0.834	0.837	0.036	23.031
X1.4 <- (X1)	0.780	0.772	0.063	12.464
X2.1 <- (X2)	0.769	0.768	0.067	11.410
X2.2 <- (X2)	0.803	0.798	0.055	14.709
X2.3 <- (X2)	0.811	0.805	0.062	13.122
X3.1 <- (X3)	0.820	0.814	0.044	18.752
X3.2 <- (X3)	0.890	0.888	0.030	30.120
X3.3 <- (X3)	0.843	0.832	0.054	15.616
X3.4 <- (X3)	0.881	0.882	0.028	31.497
Y1.1 <- (Y)	0.897	0.896	0.019	46.291
Y1.2 <- (Y)	0.873	0.872	0.026	33.361
Y1.3 <- (Y)	0.869	0.868	0.029	30.198

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS 4, 2025

The validity of the indicators is tested through factor loading values and T-statistic. An indicator is considered valid if it has a factor loading > 0.50 and/or a T-statistic > 1.96 ($\alpha = 0.05$), which indicates a strong relationship between the indicator and its construct. Based on the outer loading results, all indicators for the variables Brand Awareness (X1), Electronic Word of Mouth (X2), Brand Trust (X3), and Brand Preference (Y) meet these criteria, thus confirming convergent validity. Validity is also confirmed through cross-loading, where each indicator shows the highest loading value on the construct it measures compared to other variables.

Table 2.
Cross Loading

	Brand Awareness (X1)	Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)	Brand Trust (X3)	Brand Preference (Y1)
X1.1	0.801	0.336	0.156	0.321
X1.2	0.754	0.225	0.291	0.345
X1.3	0.834	0.394	0.248	0.538
X1.4	0.780	0.202	0.200	0.324
X2.1	0.356	0.769	0.203	0.441
X2.2	0.257	0.803	0.119	0.397
X2.3	0.287	0.811	0.292	0.421
X3.1	0.218	0.227	0.820	0.267
X3.2	0.273	0.253	0.890	0.351
X3.3	0.194	0.152	0.843	0.196
X3.4	0.269	0.235	0.881	0.423
Y1.1	0.417	0.477	0.382	0.897
Y1.2	0.425	0.446	0.302	0.873
Y1.3	0.489	0.474	0.330	0.869

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS 4, 2025

Based on the results of the cross-loading analysis, all indicators show the highest loading value on their original constructs, namely Brand Awareness (X1), Electronic Word of Mouth (X2), Brand Trust (X3), and Brand Preference (Y), compared to other constructs. This finding confirms that each indicator has adequate discrimination; thus, the construct validity in the model is stated to be good and suitable for use in further analysis.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant Validity on reflective indicators is evaluated through cross-loading analysis and comparison between the square root of AVE and the correlation between constructs. The AVE value is used to assess convergent validity, where $AVE > 0.5$ indicates that the construct is capable of explaining more than half of the variance of its indicators. Thus, the model is declared to meet the validity criteria if each construct has an AVE value above 0.5.

Table 3.
Averaged Variance Extracted (AVE)

	<i>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</i>
<i>Brand Awareness (X1)</i>	0.629
<i>Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)</i>	0.631
<i>Brand Trust (X3)</i>	0.738
<i>Brand Preference (Y)</i>	0.774

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS 4, 2025

The test results indicate that all variables, namely Brand Awareness (0.629), Electronic Word of Mouth (0.631), Brand Trust (0.738), and Brand Preference (0.774), have AVE values above 0.5. Thus, all constructs in the model meet the criteria for good convergent validity.

Composite Reliability

Composite Reliability measures the internal consistency of instruments in representing the same construct. An instrument is deemed reliable if it produces stable results in repeated measurements of similar phenomena.

Table 4.
Composite Reliability

	<i>Composite Reliability (rho_c)</i>
<i>Brand Awareness (X1)</i>	0.871
<i>Electronic Word Of Mouth (X2)</i>	0.837
<i>Brand Trust (X3)</i>	0.918
<i>Brand Preference (Y)</i>	0.911

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS 4, 2025

A construct is considered reliable if its Composite Reliability value is > 0.70, which reflects the consistency of indicators in representing the latent variable. The test results show that all variables, namely Brand Awareness, Electronic Word of Mouth, Brand Trust, and Brand Preference, have values above this threshold, thus meeting the adequate reliability criteria.

Latent Variable Correlations

In the PLS approach, the relationships between constructs, both between exogenous and endogenous variables as well as among exogenous variables, can correlate with each other. The maximum correlation is valued at 1, and the closer it gets to that value indicates the stronger the relationship between constructs.

Table 5.
Latent Variable Correlations

	<i>Brand Awareness (X1)</i>	<i>Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)</i>	<i>Brand Trust (X3)</i>	<i>Brand Preference (Y)</i>
<i>Brand Awareness (X1)</i>	1.000	0.380	0.286	0.505
<i>Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)</i>	0.380	1.000	0.260	0.530
<i>Brand Trust (X3)</i>	0.286	0.260	1.000	0.385
<i>Brand Preference (Y)</i>	0.505	0.530	0.385	1.000

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS 4, 2025

The analysis results indicate that all variables are positively correlated, although with different strengths. The highest correlation occurs between Electronic Word of Mouth (X2) and Brand Preference (Y) at 0.530, followed by Brand Awareness (X1) and Brand Preference (Y) at 0.505. The lowest correlation is noted between Brand Trust (X3) and Electronic Word of Mouth (X2) at 0.385, which still shows a positive relationship despite being weak.

Analysis of PLS Model

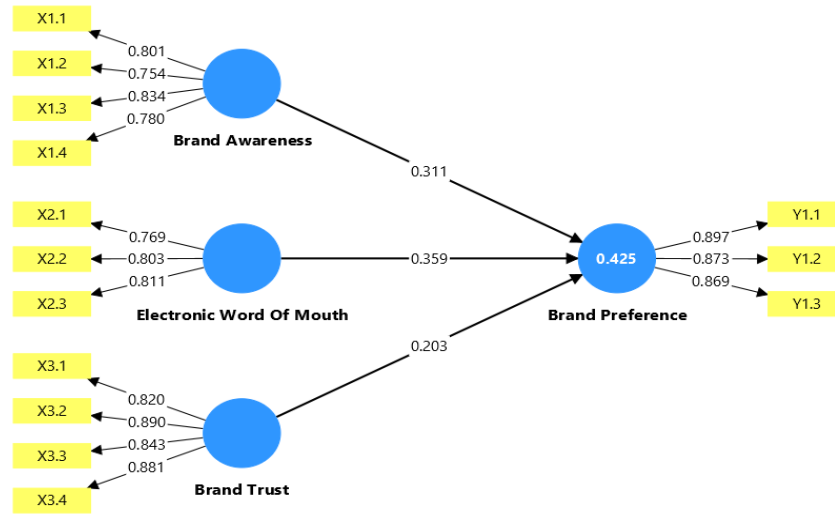


Figure 2.
PLS Output Path Diagram

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS 4, 2025

Based on the PLS output, the highest factor loading values for each variable are found in the Brand Recall indicator (X1.3) at 0.834 for Brand Awareness, Content (X2.3) at 0.811 for Electronic Word of Mouth, and Brand Competence (X3.2) at 0.890 for Brand Trust. These values indicate the most dominant indicators in representing each construct.

Inner Model

Table 6.
R-Square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Brand Preference	0.425	0.407

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS 4, 2025

The R-Square value of Brand Preference at 0.425 indicates that Brand Awareness, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust collectively explain 42.5% of the variance in Brand Preference. The remaining 57.5% is influenced by other factors outside the model and error.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing can be seen from the coefficient results and the T-statistic value of the inner model in the following table:

Table 7.
Path Coefficients (Mean, STDEV, T-Values)

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
Brand Awareness (X1) -> Brand Preference (Y)	0.311	0.318	0.088	3.525	0.000
Electronic Word of Mouth (X2) -> Brand Preference (Y)	0.359	0.365	0.087	4.139	0.000

Brand Preference (Y)					
Brand Trust (X3) -> Brand Preference (Y)	0.203	0.205	0.100	2.017	0.022

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS 4, 2025

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, all independent variables have been proven to have a positive and significant effect on Brand Preference (Y). Brand Awareness (X1) shows a positive and significant effect with a path coefficient of 0.311 and a t-statistic of 3.525 ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Electronic Word of Mouth (X2) has a positive and significant effect with a path coefficient of 0.359 and a t-statistic of 4.139 ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Brand Trust (X3) has a positive and significant effect with a path coefficient of 0.203 and a t-statistic of 2.017 ($p = 0.022 < 0.05$).

The Influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Preference

Based on research findings, Brand Awareness plays an important role in shaping Brand Preference for Richeese Factory among Gen Z in Surabaya. The higher the brand awareness, the greater the tendency for consumers to choose it. The results of the questionnaire show that Brand Recall has the greatest influence, reflecting high exposure, familiarity, and emotional closeness of respondents to the brand. Gen Z, who are active on social media, utilize digital platforms to interact with the brand, strengthening their emotional attachment (Hidayati & Rahmawati, 2023). The intensity of this interaction, especially through personal digital experiences, further solidifies the emotional relationship with the brand (Song, 2024).

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of (Rodhiyah, 2020), which indicate that Brand Awareness influences Brand Preference through promotions and interactive events. The research by (Azhar, 2021) also found that consistent brand recognition and exposure can enhance consumer preference across various industries. Therefore, Brand Awareness becomes an important strategy for Richeese Factory in shaping brand preference, especially through the optimization of social media and digital platforms that align with the characteristics of Gen Z. Success in building strong brand awareness will provide a competitive advantage in the fast-food market.

The Influence Electronic Word of Mouth of on Brand Preference

Based on the research findings, it shows that Electronic Word of Mouth plays an important role in shaping Brand Preference for Richeese Factory, especially among Gen Z. The more positive information shared through digital platforms, the greater the tendency of other consumers to form positive attitudes and preferences towards the brand. The results of the questionnaire indicate that content indicators, including clarity, details, and honesty of information, have the greatest impact. Gen Z is more likely to trust brands that are open and responsive (Efendi & Giyana, 2025), and they are more influenced by user reviews than formal advertisements (Panjaitan & Simanjuntak, 2024). Reviews considered credible and relevant reinforce their preference for Richeese Factory.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of (Azhar, 2021), which state that Electronic Word of Mouth has a stronger influence compared to traditional advertising

because it originates from real experiences. Research by (Latifah, 2024) also proves that online reviews and recommendations are more effective in shaping perceptions and enhancing brand preferences. Thus, Electronic Word of Mouth becomes an important strategy for Richeese Factory in building Brand Preference. Brands need to encourage relevant positive reviews and actively respond to consumers to strengthen their image and competitive advantage.

The Influence of Brand Trust on Brand Preference

Based on the research results, the Brand Trust variable has been proven to contribute to forming Brand Preference for Richeese Factory. The higher the level of consumer trust, the greater the likelihood that they will choose Richeese Factory over its competitors. The results of the questionnaire indicate that the indicator with the highest factor loading is brand competence, where Gen Z assesses Richeese Factory as consistent in quality and capable of meeting expectations, thus building trust through perceptions of professionalism. They also value authenticity, transparency, and an interactive purchasing experience (Efendi & Giyana, 2025), which strengthens the relationship and preference for this brand.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of (Dam, 2020), which states that Brand Trust influences Brand Preference, as consumers tend to choose brands they trust. The research by (Sinta Dewi, 2022) also found that trust in restaurant services enhances consumer preference, formed by the perception that the brand is capable of meeting needs and addressing dissatisfaction from other brands. Thus, building and maintaining Brand Trust is an important strategy for Richeese Factory to increase Brand Preference among Gen Z. Trust built through consistency in quality, competence, and experiences that meet expectations will encourage consumers to make Richeese Factory their top choice in the fast-food restaurant category.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research indicate that Brand Awareness, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Brand Trust have an impact on Brand Preference for Richeese Factory among Gen Z in Surabaya. These findings emphasize that strengthening brand exposure through digital media, managing online consumer communication, and maintaining consistency in service and product quality are crucial factors in shaping brand preference in the young consumer segment. The implications of these results highlight the importance of an integrated and responsive digital marketing strategy that addresses the dynamics of digital-native consumer behavior. Therefore, companies are advised to enhance the effectiveness of digital campaigns, actively manage online reviews, and maintain consumer trust through a consistent brand experience. Further research is recommended to examine additional variables such as brand image, customer satisfaction, or price perception, as well as to expand the geographic scope of respondents in order to obtain a more comprehensive and general picture.

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