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# Identifying the Dimensions and Components of Enhancing Brand Equity in the Food Industry through a Sensory Marketing Mix and BETTER Strategy Approach

## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to identify the dimensions and components that enhance brand equity in the food industry by integrating a sensory marketing mix with the BETTER strategy. This research employed a qualitative design grounded in the principles of grounded theory. The study population consisted of academic experts, managers, consultants, and marketing specialists with extensive professional experience in brand management and the food industry. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on managerial expertise, scholarly contributions, and practical knowledge of branding. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews supported by an interview protocol to ensure consistency and rigor. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and systematically coded using the three-stage coding process of grounded theory—open, axial, and selective coding. This iterative approach enabled the development of categories and the formulation of a paradigmatic model that captured the causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences of brand equity development in the food sector. The analysis revealed several causal conditions influencing brand equity, including product quality, customer trust, sensory experience, innovation, and storytelling. Contextual factors such as cultural eating habits, economic conditions, and digital technologies shaped brand strategies, while intervening conditions like global competition, regulatory frameworks, and sustainability requirements moderated their effectiveness. Core categories identified included multisensory brand experiences, emotional connections, packaging aesthetics, and digital engagement. Strategies such as sensory-driven product development, emotional branding, and humanized communication emerged as central to enhancing brand equity. Consequences included increased loyalty, repeat purchases, premium price acceptance, resilience during crises, and sustainable competitive advantage. The study demonstrates that brand equity in the food industry is a multidimensional construct shaped by the interplay of sensory, emotional, cultural, and strategic elements. Integrating sensory marketing practices with the BETTER strategy provides a holistic framework for achieving stronger consumer connections, enhanced brand image, and long-term differentiation.

Keywords: Brand equity; sensory marketing; BETTER strategy; food industry; grounded theory; consumer loyalty; innovation; storytelling.

## Introduction

Brand equity has emerged as one of the most critical intangible assets that organizations cultivate in order to sustain competitive advantage in increasingly dynamic and globalized markets. In the food industry, where product choices are abundant and consumer preferences evolve rapidly, the importance of building, maintaining, and enhancing brand equity cannot be overstated. Brand equity reflects the value that consumers attribute to a brand beyond its functional utility, shaping

not only their willingness to purchase but also their loyalty and advocacy. Over the past two decades, scholars have sought to unpack the antecedents, mediating processes, and consequences of brand equity, producing a complex yet insightful body of literature. This introduction explores those insights, situating the current study within ongoing academic debates and practical challenges in the field.

A foundational strand of research has emphasized the consumer-based perspective of brand equity, highlighting its reliance on brand awareness, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty [1, 2]. Studies have consistently shown that these dimensions are influenced by consumer perceptions and experiences across multiple touchpoints [3]. For example, in fast fashion and fast-moving consumer goods sectors, consumer-based brand equity serves as the linchpin for strategic differentiation [4, 5]. Scholars argue that building strong consumer-based brand equity requires organizations to simultaneously manage functional, emotional, and experiential elements of brand delivery [6]. This perspective has subsequently been adapted to various industries, including the food sector, where experiential consumption is dominant and highly sensory-driven [7].

Within this context, the concept of brand experience has gained prominence. Research has highlighted that consumer experiences—whether through taste, touch, sight, sound, or smell—shape how brand equity is formed and sustained [7, 8]. Indeed, multisensory experiences enhance emotional attachment and foster word-of-mouth advocacy, as demonstrated in tourism and hospitality branding [8, 9]. In retail and service settings, brand experience serves as both a mediator and antecedent of customer-based brand equity, amplifying perceptions of trust, quality, and brand distinctiveness [10, 11]. These findings align with studies in e-commerce and social media contexts, where experiential factors significantly affect consumer loyalty and engagement [2, 12].

Marketing strategies have been central to shaping brand equity, with both traditional and digital approaches offering distinctive pathways. Integrated marketing communications, for instance, have been shown to positively influence brand equity in service industries such as hospitality [6]. Similarly, content marketing and storytelling strategies have been identified as essential for generating awareness and trust [13, 14]. In fast fashion and consumer goods industries, promotion strategies, including advertising and sales promotions, demonstrate both positive and paradoxical effects on consumer perceptions of brand equity [15]. These insights highlight the nuanced role of promotional efforts, which must balance immediate consumer attraction with long-term brand building.

The advent of social media has revolutionized the way brands engage with consumers, creating dynamic spaces for co-creation and interaction [16, 17]. Social media activities have been empirically linked to greater consumer engagement, loyalty, and equity, particularly when they stimulate emotional responses and foster communities [18-20]. Studies on Netflix, iPhone, and white goods brands demonstrate how social media interactions mediate consumer perceptions through mechanisms such as awareness, trust, and experiential value [16, 19, 21]. Moreover, influencer marketing has been recognized as an increasingly powerful force in shaping consumer-based brand equity, especially by driving awareness and engagement [22].

Beyond the functional and promotional domains, branding in the modern era must also navigate sustainability and ethical considerations. Research on green marketing mix strategies has shown that environmentally conscious practices contribute positively to green brand equity in emerging markets [5, 23]. Similarly, employee-based brand equity has been found to significantly influence customer perceptions, reinforcing the idea that internal branding efforts are as critical as external

communications [24]. These studies collectively underscore the growing recognition that brand equity is a multidimensional construct shaped by not only consumer perceptions but also organizational values and sustainability practices.

Another emerging theme concerns the integration of digital innovation into branding. The rise of the metaverse and other immersive digital platforms has opened new frontiers for brand building, where virtual experiences can enhance or even substitute physical ones [25]. Research suggests that brands that successfully adapt to these environments can create strong emotional bonds with digitally native consumers, thereby expanding their equity [25]. At the same time, studies on sensory attributes and brand extensions indicate that consumers are increasingly attentive to how brands extend across categories while maintaining sensory consistency [26]. This is particularly relevant in the food industry, where sensory cues strongly influence perceptions of authenticity, quality, and trust.

The food industry, as a highly competitive and culturally embedded sector, provides fertile ground for studying brand equity. Scholars have highlighted the importance of consumer perceptions of product quality and taste, which are tightly linked to brand equity outcomes [14, 27]. Studies on juice brands, dried fruit products, and food tourism experiences all suggest that brand equity is deeply intertwined with sensory marketing and cultural expectations [9, 14, 27]. Moreover, as global consumer trends shift toward healthier and more sustainable food options, food companies face the challenge of balancing innovation with authenticity. This has been reflected in work on behavioral biases in consumer decision-making, which shows how promotional strategies and consumption paradoxes affect brand equity in the food sector [15].

Cross-industry evidence further enriches this perspective. Research on automotive, apparel, tourism, and digital service brands demonstrates that brand equity is not confined to one type of product or service but is shaped by universal factors such as trust, awareness, sensory experience, and innovation [4, 8, 17, 28]. At the same time, industry-specific conditions add unique layers of complexity. For example, in automotive industries, co-creation behaviors mediated by brand experience play a crucial role [17], while in hospitality, integrated marketing communications create distinct brand identities [6]. In food branding, cultural consumption practices and evolving health concerns heighten the importance of sensory consistency and quality assurance [9, 27].

Despite these advances, gaps remain in integrating sensory marketing perspectives with strategic frameworks that account for both consumer behavior and organizational practices. The concept of sensory-driven branding has been explored in various contexts, but its systematic application to food industries within a broader strategic lens, such as the BETTER strategy, remains underdeveloped. Previous research has highlighted the role of sensory identity elements such as packaging, flavor innovation, and multisensory cues in enhancing consumer engagement and loyalty [7, 26]. Yet, the combination of sensory approaches with holistic strategies that integrate emotional, cultural, and technological dimensions calls for further empirical exploration.

The current study is situated at this intersection, aiming to identify the dimensions and components that contribute to the enhancement of brand equity in the food industry through a dual lens of sensory marketing and the BETTER strategy. By building on the foundational insights of prior research across multiple domains—including consumer-based brand equity, social media marketing, green branding, employee engagement, and multisensory experiences—this study addresses the need for a comprehensive framework that can capture both the antecedents and outcomes of brand equity. In doing so, it not only contributes to theory but also provides practical implications for managers and policymakers seeking to strengthen brand positioning in an increasingly competitive and sensory-driven market environment.

The overarching objective of this study, therefore, is to explore and systematize the dimensions, antecedents, and consequences of brand equity enhancement in the food industry, with particular attention to the role of sensory marketing and the BETTER strategy.

## Methodology

This study was designed as a qualitative inquiry grounded in the logic of grounded theory, aiming to explore the dimensions and components that contribute to enhancing brand equity in the food industry within the framework of a sensory marketing mix and the BETTER strategy. The research population consisted of academic experts, managers, consultants, and practitioners actively engaged in marketing and brand management. More specifically, participants included experienced professionals holding managerial positions in food industry companies, policy-makers familiar with branding policies, and specialists with deep knowledge of theoretical foundations in marketing and branding. Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of key informants who could provide rich insights into the subject matter. The criteria for participant selection involved having substantial managerial experience in both scientific and executive domains, or having published contributions in the field of marketing and branding. The process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring the sufficiency and depth of data collected for grounded theory development.

Data were primarily collected using semi-structured interviews, which were chosen for their balance between structure and flexibility. Based on Bernard's typology, interviews can range from informal conversations to structured formats; however, this study adopted the semi-structured format because it allows the interviewer to follow a prepared guide while still remaining open to emerging insights. The interview guide contained a list of predefined themes and questions designed to probe into the antecedents, components, and consequences of brand equity enhancement through sensory marketing and the BETTER strategy. This ensured that while all interviews covered the same fundamental issues, there was enough latitude for participants to elaborate and introduce novel perspectives.

To ensure consistency and rigor, an interview protocol was developed before data collection. This protocol outlined the central themes, guiding questions, and the sequencing of discussions. It also served as a checklist to guarantee that each interview addressed the same core areas, while allowing adaptive follow-up questions based on participants' responses. The questions in the protocol were derived from a thorough review of the literature, gaps identified in prior studies, and the theoretical framework under investigation. As is characteristic of qualitative research, the protocol evolved throughout the study, with minor modifications introduced in response to new directions suggested during interviews. Nevertheless, the main focus remained constant: exploring the dimensions, antecedents, and outcomes associated with enhancing brand equity in the food industry through sensory marketing and BETTER strategy practices.

The interviews were conducted in environments convenient to participants and were recorded using audio devices, with additional field notes taken during each session to capture nonverbal cues and contextual information. Written notes and recordings were later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The combination of recordings, notes, and the structured protocol provided a comprehensive and reliable dataset for subsequent analysis.

Data analysis followed the systematic procedures of grounded theory, characterized by iterative, cumulative, and comparative processes. Each interview transcript was subjected to open coding, where the smallest meaningful units of text—such as sentences, phrases, or short paragraphs—were assigned conceptual labels. This phase generated an extensive pool

of initial codes reflecting participants' views and experiences. Next, axial coding was applied to group related codes into higher-order categories, establishing relationships between subcategories and broader conceptual themes. This stage enabled the integration of fragmented data into coherent clusters, clarifying the dimensions and contexts of the studied phenomenon. Finally, selective coding was employed to identify the core category that represented the central theme of the research, integrating all other categories into a unified theoretical framework.

Throughout this process, constant comparison was applied, whereby newly coded data were continuously compared with existing codes and categories to refine conceptual accuracy. Emerging clusters of categories were organized into thematic blocks that reflected causal conditions, contextual and intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences, consistent with the paradigm model in grounded theory. The analysis was both recursive and evolutionary, meaning that data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously, with each informing the other. As the coding advanced, categories were saturated with supporting data until no new insights emerged, ensuring robustness of the theoretical model. The outcome of this analytic process was a paradigmatic model that captured the interplay of factors influencing the enhancement of brand equity in the food industry through sensory marketing and BETTER strategy.

## Findings and Results

The qualitative analysis of interviews with marketing experts, managers, and consultants in the food industry led to the identification of multiple themes and categories. These themes reflect the complex interplay of causal, contextual, and intervening conditions that shape brand equity, as well as the strategies organizations employ and the consequences they achieve. The results provide a rich picture of how sensory marketing and the BETTER strategy together contribute to strengthening brand equity in this sector.

**Table 1**

*Extracted Themes and Categories from Qualitative Analysis*

| Thematic Dimension | Subcategories Identified |
| --- | --- |
| Causal Conditions | Perceived product quality, customer trust, brand social responsibility, sensory experience, strategic consistency in sensory marketing, continuous innovation, brand differentiation, information transparency, integrated brand messaging, evolving consumer expectations regarding health and quality, customer experience focus, brand storytelling, declining brand loyalty, customer engagement, personalization, unique experiences, data-driven prediction of needs, brand touchpoint synchronization, product quality monitoring, feedback integration, compliance with hygiene standards |
| Contextual Conditions | Food culture and eating habits, preference for healthy/organic options, awareness of modern and fast foods, brand awareness via advertising and customer experience, purchasing power and income levels, impact of economic fluctuations, role of digital technology in purchasing behavior, influence of online reviews and e-commerce, governmental regulations and policies affecting food branding and production |
| Intervening Conditions | Innovation level in food product development, market competition intensity, global brand penetration, R&D costs, consumer lifestyle shifts, supply chain reliability, market sensitivity to quality, rising raw material prices, customer awareness of quality, media and social media influence, emotional branding storytelling, legal requirements, digital data analysis, organizational marketing capabilities, health and environmental regulations, packaging sustainability, financial constraints on innovation |
| Core Categories | Brand loyalty, emotional connection with consumers, daily brand use, multisensory brand experience (taste, sound, touch, smell, sight), emotional attachment, brand community, sensory identity elements (sound logo, auditory memory), sensory marketing mix (five senses, visual and olfactory stimulation), packaging aesthetics, innovative flavors, consumer-centric food design, physical brand visibility, store layout, advertising effectiveness, sensory storytelling, competitive differentiation, digital engagement, brand social responsibility |
| Strategies | Sensory-driven new product development, flavor and packaging innovation, emotional branding via storytelling and customer narratives, emotional advertising, humanized brand voice |
| Consequences | Increased customer loyalty, repeat purchases, brand recommendation, enhanced brand image and distinct market positioning, stronger emotional connections, improved brand resilience in crises, willingness to pay premium prices, sustainable competitive advantage through |

The analysis revealed that causal conditions revolved primarily around perceptions of product quality and trust, which are central to food brand equity. Customers placed significant emphasis on sensory experiences and continuous innovation, viewing these as essential for differentiation in a highly competitive market. Strategic consistency in sensory marketing, combined with transparency and integrated messaging, was identified as a driver of trust and loyalty. Furthermore, consumer expectations regarding health and quality, along with the need for personalization, storytelling, and unique experiences, were found to be decisive in shaping brand equity.
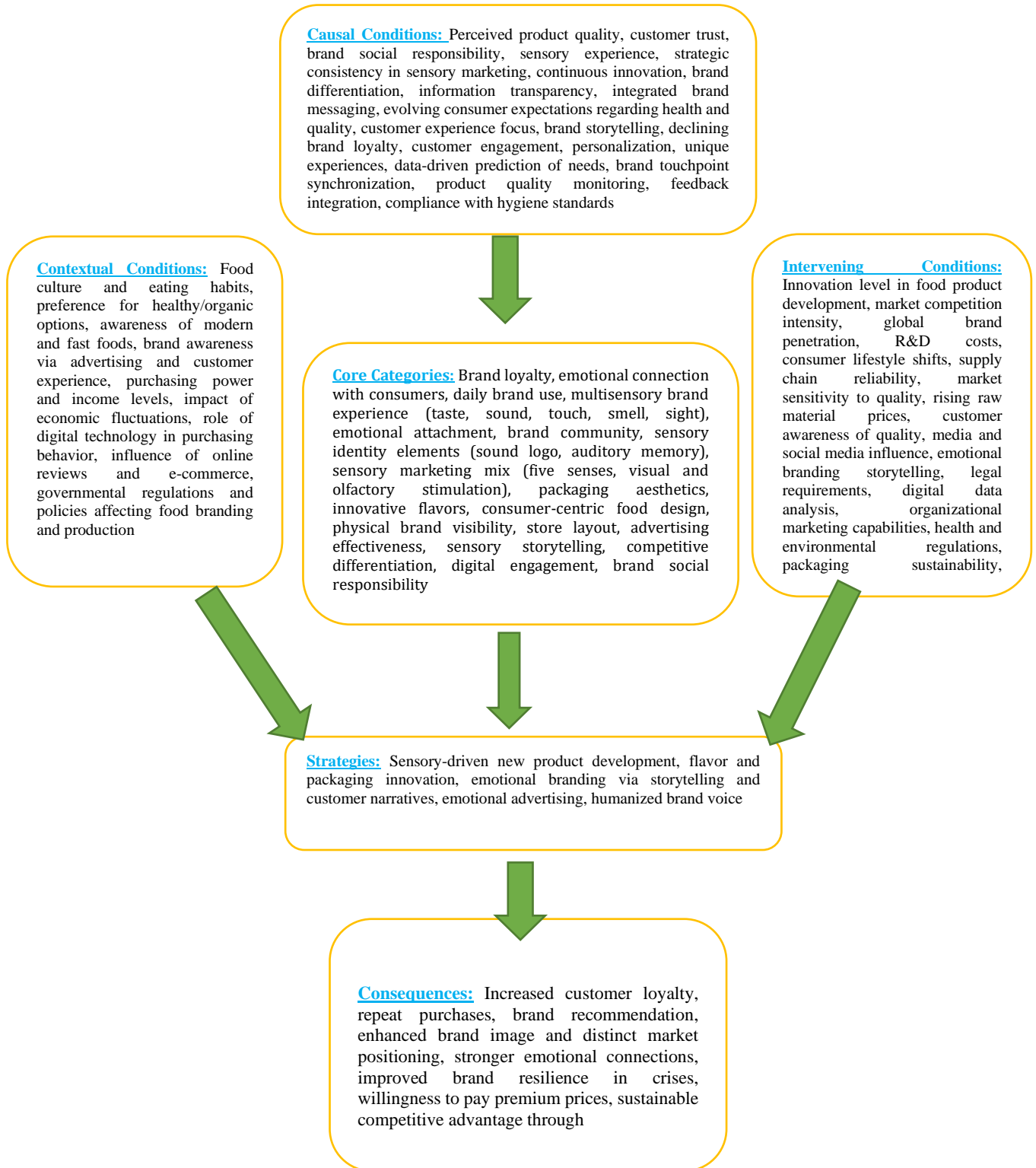
Contextual factors highlighted the cultural and socio-economic environment influencing consumer choices. Food culture and eating habits, the growing demand for healthy and organic options, and awareness of fast and modern foods were significant. External factors such as purchasing power, economic fluctuations, and governmental regulations emerged as critical constraints or enablers of branding strategies. Additionally, the role of digital technologies, including online reviews and e-commerce platforms, was prominent in shaping consumer awareness and attitudes toward food brands.

Intervening conditions pointed to broader systemic influences that mediate the relationship between causal factors and brand strategies. These included the intensity of competition, the penetration of global brands, and the rising costs of raw materials and R&D. Media influence, lifestyle changes, and consumer awareness of health and quality added complexity to branding efforts. Regulatory pressures on health, safety, and environmental sustainability, combined with financial constraints, also limited innovation potential. At the same time, organizations' internal marketing capabilities and use of digital data analysis provided opportunities to navigate these challenges.

The core categories emerging from the data reflected the essence of brand equity in this context. Emotional connection, loyalty, and multisensory experiences were central to how consumers engaged with brands. Respondents emphasized the role of packaging aesthetics, innovative flavors, and store layout in shaping sensory identity and consumer attachment. Sensory storytelling and digital engagement were highlighted as key mechanisms for creating competitive differentiation. Moreover, elements such as brand community and social responsibility further strengthened the brand's identity and resonance with consumers.

The findings identified strategies that organizations implement to reinforce brand equity. These included sensory-driven product development, innovations in flavors and packaging, and emotional advertising campaigns. Storytelling was used as a powerful tool to humanize brand voice and foster deeper connections with consumers. The development of a humanized and emotionally engaging brand identity emerged as a strategic imperative in achieving competitive advantage.

The consequences of adopting these strategies were evident in the form of increased loyalty, repeat purchases, and stronger emotional ties between consumers and brands. Enhanced brand image and distinct positioning in the marketplace created resilience, particularly during crises. Importantly, consumers demonstrated a willingness to pay premium prices for brands that successfully integrated sensory marketing with social responsibility and innovation. Ultimately, these strategies enabled companies to secure a sustainable competitive advantage in a dynamic food industry landscape.

**Figure 1**

*Final Paradigm Model*

**Causal Conditions:** Perceived product quality, customer trust, brand social responsibility, sensory experience, strategic consistency in sensory marketing, continuous innovation, brand differentiation, information transparency, integrated brand messaging, evolving consumer expectations regarding health and quality, customer experience focus, brand storytelling, declining brand loyalty, customer engagement, personalization, unique experiences, data-driven prediction of needs, brand touchpoint synchronization, product quality monitoring, feedback integration, compliance with hygiene standards

**Contextual Conditions:** Food culture and eating habits, preference for healthy/organic options, awareness of modern and fast foods, brand awareness via advertising and customer experience, purchasing power and income levels, impact of economic fluctuations, role of digital technology in purchasing behavior, influence of online reviews and e-commerce, governmental regulations and policies affecting food branding and production

**Core Categories:** Brand loyalty, emotional connection with consumers, daily brand use, multisensory brand experience (taste, sound, touch, smell, sight), emotional attachment, brand community, sensory identity elements (sound logo, auditory memory), sensory marketing mix (five senses, visual and olfactory stimulation), packaging aesthetics, innovative flavors, consumer-centric food design, physical brand visibility, store layout, advertising effectiveness, sensory storytelling, competitive differentiation, digital engagement, brand social responsibility

**Intervening Conditions:** Innovation level in food product development, market competition intensity, global brand penetration, R&D costs, consumer lifestyle shifts, supply chain reliability, market sensitivity to quality, rising raw material prices, customer awareness of quality, media and social media influence, emotional branding storytelling, legal requirements, digital data analysis, organizational marketing capabilities, health and environmental regulations, packaging sustainability,

**Strategies:** Sensory-driven new product development, flavor and packaging innovation, emotional branding via storytelling and customer narratives, emotional advertising, humanized brand voice

**Consequences:** Increased customer loyalty, repeat purchases, brand recommendation, enhanced brand image and distinct market positioning, stronger emotional connections, improved brand resilience in crises, willingness to pay premium prices, sustainable competitive advantage through

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal that the enhancement of brand equity in the food industry is a complex and multidimensional process shaped by causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, mediated through sensory and emotional strategies, and culminating in a variety of outcomes including loyalty, advocacy, and willingness to pay premium prices. The qualitative analysis identified factors such as perceived product quality, brand trust, sensory experience, innovation, storytelling, and social responsibility as critical causal conditions. These conditions were strongly reinforced by contextual factors such as food culture, consumer health awareness, economic conditions, and digital technology. Intervening conditions such as global competition, R&D costs, regulatory frameworks, and supply chain constraints also exerted significant influence, either amplifying or restricting the ability of food companies to build sustainable brand equity. Strategies identified in this study—including sensory-driven product development, emotional storytelling, packaging innovation, and humanized branding—translated these factors into tangible managerial practices. The consequences of these strategies were evident in stronger emotional ties with consumers, improved brand image, market resilience, and long-term competitive advantage.

The results align with previous findings in the brand equity literature, confirming the importance of consumer-based perspectives where brand awareness, perceived quality, and loyalty are central dimensions [1, 2]. In particular, the strong emphasis placed on perceived product quality and trust resonates with studies in e-commerce, where consumer perceptions of reliability directly shaped brand equity [2]. Similarly, the current study highlights the value of sensory experiences and storytelling in differentiating brands in competitive environments, findings that are consistent with research on multisensory experiences and their impact on brand love and loyalty [7]. By integrating sensory identity elements such as packaging aesthetics, taste, and olfactory cues, brands can strengthen emotional attachment, echoing insights from studies on juice brands and dried fruit brands that emphasized quality and sensory consistency [14, 27].

An important contribution of this study lies in demonstrating the interdependence between innovation and consumer expectations. Respondents emphasized continuous innovation and data-driven personalization as central to sustaining engagement, particularly as consumer demands for health, transparency, and unique experiences increase. This aligns with prior findings that highlight the mediating role of brand experience between marketing activities and brand equity outcomes [10, 11]. Innovation in flavors, packaging, and communication strategies not only supports differentiation but also addresses evolving expectations for organic, sustainable, and healthier options. These findings reinforce the argument that brand equity is increasingly shaped by an alignment between corporate innovation capabilities and cultural shifts in consumption [9, 15].

The study also underscores the growing influence of digital technologies in shaping brand awareness and consumer perceptions. Respondents consistently noted the role of online reviews, social media, and e-commerce platforms in amplifying or undermining brand equity. This is strongly aligned with research demonstrating that social media marketing activities enhance consumer engagement, trust, and loyalty [18-20]. Similarly, studies in diverse contexts such as Netflix [19], iPhone products [21], and automotive brands [17] confirm that digital interaction significantly mediates the consumer-brand relationship. The present study extends these insights to the food industry, highlighting that digital spaces are no longer peripheral but central arenas where brand equity is negotiated, co-created, and maintained.

Another central theme emerging from the data is the integration of emotional branding and storytelling. The strategies identified, particularly emotional advertising, humanized brand voices, and narrative-driven communication, strongly resonate with existing literature on content marketing and storytelling [13, 25]. Storytelling creates an immersive experience

that transcends functional product attributes, fostering deeper consumer engagement and trust. These findings mirror results in tourism, hospitality, and metaverse branding research, where narratives were found to strengthen both awareness and loyalty [6, 8, 25]. In the food sector, storytelling becomes particularly potent because it is closely tied to cultural identity, authenticity, and emotional resonance, factors that this study found to be essential in driving consumer advocacy and long-term attachment.

The results also contribute to the discussion on sustainability and ethical branding. Respondents emphasized the importance of compliance with hygiene standards, sustainable packaging, and social responsibility as prerequisites for trust and differentiation. These themes are consistent with studies showing that green marketing mix strategies enhance green brand equity [23] and that consumer-based green brand equity is increasingly important in contemporary markets [5]. Similarly, the emphasis on employee trust and organizational values as contributors to external brand equity resonates with research on employee-based brand equity [24]. By embedding sustainability and social responsibility into branding strategies, food companies can respond not only to consumer demands but also to regulatory and environmental pressures.

The emphasis on contextual conditions such as food culture and purchasing power also aligns with cross-national evidence. In India, for example, studies on juice brands showed that consumer perceptions of quality dimensions significantly affected brand equity [14]. Similarly, in China, dried fruit brands leveraged marketing mix strategies to enhance equity by aligning with consumer health models [27]. The present study confirms these dynamics in the food industry by showing how cultural and economic contexts mediate consumer expectations and influence branding strategies. By situating brand equity within cultural consumption practices, the study highlights the necessity of local adaptation, an insight also supported by work on Aavin dairy products in India [29].

In addition, this study highlights the mediating role of consumer lifestyles and global competition as intervening conditions. Rising costs of innovation, regulatory restrictions, and global brand penetration were found to complicate the branding process in the food sector. These insights parallel findings in the white goods industry, where competition and consumer biases strongly influenced brand perceptions [16], and in fast fashion, where global competition shaped consumer-based brand equity [4]. The results reinforce the argument that brand equity is never formed in isolation but emerges within broader socio-economic and regulatory ecosystems that shape both managerial strategies and consumer responses.

The identification of core categories such as emotional connection, loyalty, and multisensory experiences further validates the multidimensional nature of brand equity. Research on sensory marketing and multisensory identity supports this finding, emphasizing that experiences across taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight are powerful in shaping loyalty [7, 26]. This is consistent with evidence from sustainable tourism experiences [8] and from studies on packaging aesthetics and innovative design in food branding [9]. By showing that multisensory branding strategies reinforce loyalty and create daily brand usage, the present study provides a holistic framework for understanding consumer-brand relationships in the food sector.

The consequences identified in this study—such as customer loyalty, repeat purchases, premium pricing, and resilience in crises—mirror established findings in the literature. Prior studies across diverse industries, including online shopping portals [2], social media-driven brands [22], and tourism experiences [9], all emphasize that brand equity strengthens consumer loyalty and advocacy, which in turn reinforces organizational performance. The present study extends these outcomes specifically to the food industry, underscoring how sensory marketing and BETTER strategies lead to tangible business results such as competitive differentiation and willingness to pay premiums.

In sum, the findings provide strong evidence that brand equity in the food industry is shaped by an interplay of sensory, emotional, cultural, and technological factors. This study not only validates existing models of consumer-based brand equity but also extends them by emphasizing the role of sensory marketing and holistic strategic approaches in shaping outcomes.

Although the study provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of brand equity enhancement in the food industry, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relied on a qualitative methodology with a purposive sample of experts, managers, and consultants, which, while suitable for exploratory purposes, limits the generalizability of the findings. The perspectives captured may not fully represent consumer experiences at scale, particularly across diverse demographic or cultural groups. Second, the focus on the food industry means that the findings, while rich in sector-specific detail, may not seamlessly translate to other industries where sensory experiences play a lesser role. Third, qualitative interviews, though detailed, are subject to interpretive bias, both from respondents and from researchers in coding and analysis. Finally, while the grounded theory approach provides a systematic framework for theory-building, it inherently reflects the context and participants involved in this study, making cross-validation necessary in future work.

Future studies could build on these findings by adopting quantitative or mixed-methods designs to validate and extend the proposed framework. Large-scale surveys could examine consumer perceptions of brand equity dimensions across different food categories, allowing for broader generalizability. Cross-cultural studies could provide comparative insights into how cultural and socio-economic contexts shape sensory and emotional branding. Moreover, longitudinal designs could assess how brand equity evolves over time, particularly in response to shifts in consumer preferences for health, sustainability, and digital engagement. Researchers might also explore the integration of emerging technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, or metaverse branding in shaping sensory experiences and equity. Finally, further studies could examine the interaction between employee-based brand equity and consumer-based brand equity, providing a holistic view of how internal organizational values shape external perceptions.

For practitioners, the study highlights the necessity of integrating sensory marketing strategies with broader organizational practices to enhance brand equity. Food companies should prioritize consistent delivery of quality, trust, and innovation, ensuring that sensory elements such as taste, packaging, and visual identity are aligned with consumer expectations. Managers should also invest in storytelling and emotional branding, creating narratives that resonate with cultural values and personal identities. Digital engagement should be leveraged strategically, not only to build awareness but also to foster deeper connections and co-creation with consumers. Furthermore, embedding sustainability and social responsibility into brand strategies will help strengthen trust and resilience in increasingly competitive markets. By adopting a holistic approach that aligns sensory, emotional, and strategic dimensions, food industry managers can build sustainable brand equity that fosters long-term competitive advantage.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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