

Digital Word-of-Mouth Dynamics: Unpacking the Influence of Product Engagement and Brand Perception

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ABSTRACT

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which can be thought of as a digital form of word-of-mouth recommendation, has emerged as a significant source of information for consumers. This research paper explores the impact of eWOM on consumers' purchasing intentions. Additionally, the study investigates how product involvement and brand image moderate the connection between eWOM and purchase intentions. The participants of this study have previously sought online opinions or reviews when considering a purchase. The survey is divided into three sections, addressing eWOM search experiences, measuring various variables, and collecting demographic and internet usage data. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is employed to analyze the relationships within the research model. Examining online reviews and comments can boost consumers' confidence in their buying choices. Research findings demonstrate that the quality and quantity of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) content, as well as the expertise of the sender, positively influence the likelihood of making a purchase. Significantly, the level of interest in a product and the brand's perception play a role in moderating the connection between eWOM and purchase intentions. In essence, this study offers fresh insights into impact of eWOM on customer purchase intentions.

Keywords: Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), Product involvement, Brand perception.

Introduction

Compared to typical retail formats, the World Wide Web is a new marketing channel that is very different. Unlike in actual locations, customers who purchase online are unable to directly handle or smell the items. As such, the product

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information that websites provide plays a major role in their purchase decisions. Online retailers seek to enable user-generated product reviews on their platforms in order to overcome this constraint. Because it provides oblique insights into the items, this user-generated content is essential for assisting consumers in making knowledgeable buying decisions.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is informal communication that is aimed at other customers and discusses the ownership, use, or features of certain products and services, or the sellers of individual vendors. The dissemination of word-of-mouth (WOM) has traditionally occurred through casual conversations among friends, but its usefulness has also been recognized and applied in real-world situations. WOM is a key factor in the acceptance of new goods by non-adopters, as demonstrated by Bass's groundbreaking research in 1969. Additionally, marketing experts have made great use of the idea of good word of mouth, using it as a reliable source of information about products as well as a way to assess the efficacy of marketing tactics like advertising (Li and Zhan, 2011).

The reach and influence of Word-of-mouth communication have increased dramatically due to the quick expansion and enhanced communication capabilities of the Internet. As the digital equivalent of conventional word-of-mouth advertising, online reviews have become an indispensable source of information for customers. These come from people who have purchased and used goods, and they are essential to many company management activities, including building a brand, attracting and keeping customers, developing new items, and ensuring quality. Leading businesses make it simple for customers to read and leave product evaluations on their websites, like Circuit City and Amazon.com. Referral value is the most important measure of a customer's propensity to suggest a product to others.

Electronic word of mouth, or eWOM, is word of mouth sent digitally and has emerged as a major information resource for customers making decisions about what to buy. While several researches have looked at how online product reviews affect sales, few have examined how eWOM affects customers' inclinations to buy. The purpose of this study is to close this gap by examining how customers' purchase

intentions are affected by eWOM, taking into account its amount, quality, and sender's level of competence. This research also looks at potential moderators of the association between eWOM impacts and purchase intention, such as product participation and brand image.

Electronic Word of Mouth (e WOM): Theoretical Foundation and Development of Hypotheses.

Word-of-mouth has always been a powerful force in the consumer market, especially when it comes to influencing customers' information searches and subsequent decision-making processes (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Money, Gilly, & Graham, 1998; Silverman, 1997). Electronic communication has become a crucial phenomenon as a result of the explosive growth of the Internet. This encompasses computer-mediated communication techniques including blogs, message boards, and emails, according to Buttle (1998). Electronic word-of-mouth, according to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), is "any positive or negative statement made by potential, current, or past customers regarding a product or company, which is accessible to a wide audience through the Internet" (p. 39). This term supports this idea. Bickart and Schindler (2001) show that eWOM might have greater credibility than traditional word-of-mouth. In contrast to conventional word-of-mouth, Bickart and Schindler (2001) showed that eWOM could be more credible, empathetic, and relevant to customers than material created by online marketers.

Three aspects of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) are investigated in this study: the quantity, quality, and sender's level of experience. The persuasiveness of remarks in an educational message is known as eWOM quality. Demand-driven factors impact consumer purchasing decisions, and perceived information quality influences consumers' propensity to purchase. Determining the quality of information that consumers believe to be available is therefore essential to estimating their likelihood to make a purchase. The total number of posted comments is often referred to as eWOM quantity. The number of online comments on a product is used to determine its popularity and can provide insight into its success in the market. Additionally, reference points help consumers feel more confident and less likely to make mistakes when they are purchasing. People may

assume that a product's popularity and importance are higher when it has more reviews. In addition, the term "expertise" describes the knowledge, abilities, and training specialized in a certain field. Another way to think about it is as qualities like "authoritativeness," "competence," and "expertise." Users are drawn to adopt the knowledge and make judgments based on the sender's expertise when they leave comments in customer reviews.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention, in essence, refers to a consumer's inclination or willingness to buy a specific product or service. This concept, first highlighted by Fishbein and Azjen in 1975, has proven to be a remarkably accurate predictor of actual buying behavior. Numerous studies have explored this notion and consistently discovered significant connections between purchase intention and real purchasing actions. In particular, within the realm of consumer durable goods, purchase intention has demonstrated its reliability as a metric for gauging actual buying behavior, as noted by Kalwani and Silk in 1982.

In the realm of marketing research, Godes, and Mayzlin's 2009 investigation delved into leveraging external word-of-mouth communication to boost sales. Their findings indicated that such word-of-mouth communication plays a pivotal role in driving higher sales for organizations. Word of mouth, often deemed one of the most credible forms of recommendation, holds sway over consumers' product choices, as demonstrated by studies by Henricks in 1998, Brown and Reingen in 1987, and Herr, Kardes, and Kim in 1991. Additionally, the advent of the internet has made people's opinions readily accessible to others, with advice and user experiences influencing consumer behavior significantly, as outlined by Thompson in 2003.

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) stands out as a critical information source guiding consumers in their purchasing decisions. Various studies have also suggested that eWOM messages play a vital role in conveying information about the quality of products or services, as pointed out by Chevalier and Mayzlin in 2006. Furthermore, these messages effectively mitigate the risks and uncertainties that

consumers associate with buying products or services, thereby exerting a profound influence on their purchase intentions and decision-making processes, as highlighted by Chatterjee in 2001. Certainly, we can rephrase the provided text:

Evaluating the quality of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) involves assessing the content of a review in terms of information characteristics like relevance, understandability, sufficiency, and objectivity. When people browse the internet, they tend to be skeptical of reviews that lack sufficient information, especially because previous buyers are often anonymous online (Ratchford, Talukdar, and Lee, 2001). Generally, more convincing reviews have a stronger positive impact on consumers' intentions to make a purchase when all other factors are equal. Additionally, the quantity of eWOM for a product, denoted as eWOM quantity, reflects the product's popularity and its online word-of-mouth influence, as it correlates with the product's sales volume (Chatterjee 2001; Chen and Xie 2004). This can lead consumers to rationalize their buying decisions by thinking that many other people have bought this product too. Moreover, consumers tend to trust experts because they possess specialized knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). As a result, our study proposes the following:

Certainly, here are the paraphrased hypotheses:

- H1:** Consumers' intentions to buy are favourably impacted by the quality of eWOM.
- H2:** The volume of online recommendations influences customers' propensity to buy in a favourable way.
- H3:** Sender's knowledge influences customers' propensity to buy favourably.

Product Involvement

The degree to which a person considers a product to be relevant to their innate needs, values, and interests is known as product participation. As opposed to prior knowledge or experience, involvement is related to the incentive to comprehend information (Celsi and Olson 1988; Petty and Cacioppo 1984). In contrast to low-involvement situations, which tend to place more weight on peripheral cues like the

characteristics of information sources or the volume of arguments in influencing decisions, high-involvement situations typically prioritize issue-relevant arguments and product-related attributes. Thus, the following recommendations are made by this study:

H4a: Product participation moderates the association between eWOM quality and desire to buy.

H4b: Product participation moderates the association between eWOM volume and desire to buy.

H4c: The association between the sender's competence and purchase intention is moderated by the presence of the product.

Brand Image

Keller (1998) defined brand image as the perception customers have of a company when they interact with it, which is influenced by the connections they have with the company. These brand connections are complex and include judgments of the brand's value as well as emotional and behavioural attitudes towards it. Brand image is vital because, depending on customers' overall experiences with the brand, it shapes their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural reactions (Padgett and Allen, 1997).

According to Moore (1981), an organization's image is a mental evaluation of the degree of satisfaction gained from its operations and performance. Organizations may learn more about consumer attitudes toward their brands, their degree of comprehension, and their preferences by researching brand image. In essence, it offers insightful data on how clients view and interact with these businesses. Brand image is a strategic technique in brand management that aims to improve and hone how customers perceive a brand, according to Park, Jaworski, and McNish (1986). Companies work to develop a good and favorable brand image, which in turn results in a favourable perception of the brand as a whole. Customers could show a larger preference for a specific brand just because it presents a unique image in comparison to its rivals (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994).

Consumers rely on both internal and exterior information when making decisions, Engel et al. (2001) pointed out. Consumers find it tough to decide when there is a mismatch between the brand's perception and the information at hand. As a result, this research recommends that:

H5a: The association between eWOM quality and purchase intention is moderated by brand image.

H5b: The relationship between eWOM volume and purchase intention is moderated by brand image.

H5c: The relationship between the sender's knowledge and the purchase intention is moderated by brand image.

Research Assumption:

The research model for this study is presented based on the literature review:

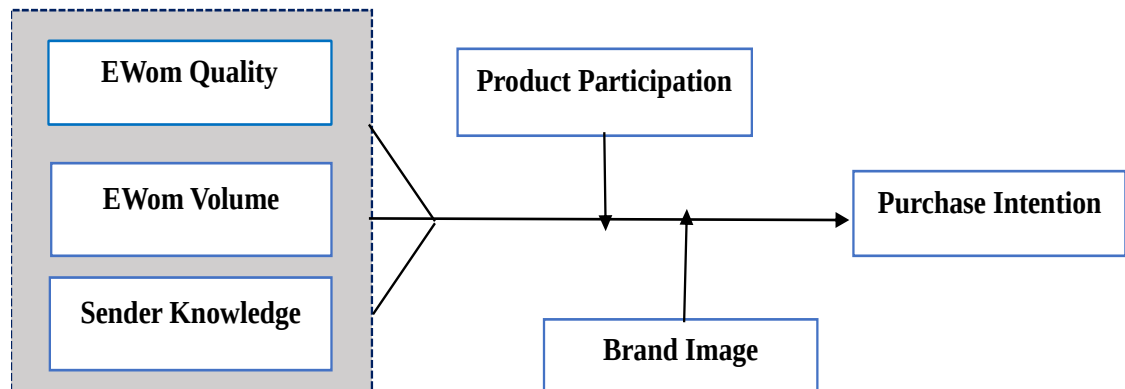


Figure -1

Table -1

Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Content
H1	Consumers' intentions to buy are favourably impacted by the quality of electronic word-of-mouth.
H2	The volume of online recommendations influences customers' propensity to buy in a favourable way.
H3	Sender knowledge influences customers' propensity to buy favourably.
H4a	Product participation moderates the association between eWOM quality

	and desire to buy.
H4b	Product participation moderates the association between eWOM volume and desire to buy.
H4c	The association between the sender's competence and purchase intention is moderated by the presence of the product.
H5a	The association between eWOM quality and purchase intention is moderated by brand image.
H5b	The relationship between eWOM volume and purchase intention is moderated by brand image.
H5c	The relationship between the sender's knowledge and the purchase intention is moderated by brand image.

Research Design

This study targeted individuals who have used the Internet to seek reviews or opinions before making purchases. The primary data collection method employed was an online survey. To gather responses, the survey link was distributed through personal websites and social media platforms such as Facebook, with the help of friends who shared the link. In total, the study received 182 genuine responses. In terms of data analysis, the researchers used descriptive statistics to summarize and describe the collected data. Additionally, they utilized structural equation modeling (SEM) with the AMOS 20 structural equation program. SEMs are statistical models that illustrate the relationships between observed (manifest) and unobserved (latent) variables, aiming to estimate coefficients within a set of structural equations. In this study, AMOS was employed to investigate causal links among variables, assess the significance of path coefficients, and evaluate the goodness-of-fit of the structural model.

Several measures were used to evaluate the structural model's goodness of fit. One tool used by the researchers to assess the goodness-of-fit of both measurement and structural models is the chi-square test (χ^2). In addition, they employed the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) as an additional measure of model fit and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) as an absolute fit index. To further assess the

model's fit, incremental fit indices like the comparative fit index (CFI) and the incremental fit index (IFI) were used.

In conclusion, this study examined people who conduct pre-purchase research online. Data were gathered using an online survey, and descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling in AMOS were utilized for analysis. Examining causal links between variables and evaluating the structural model's fit using a variety of fit indices, such as chi-square, GFI, RMSEA, IFI, and CFI, were the objectives of the study.

2.1 Data Analysis and Results

Gender distribution in the sampled population indicated that 45.4% of the population were female and 54.6% were male. The age bracket of 21 to 30 represented a massive 72.8% of the entire sample, making it the most noticeable. 58.3% of the population had graduated from a college or university, and 37.6% had earned a master's or doctorate degree. A significant 75.5% of respondents said they have used the internet for more than 8 years, showing that the user base is experienced. Additionally, the majority of respondents (82%) regularly accessed the internet. With 41.6% of respondents favoring it, forums have become the most popular place to look for product evaluations or comments. In addition, 38.2% of users looked for evaluations of 3C items (computers, consumer electronics, and communication devices), while 30.6% were looking for information on food. These data give a complete picture of the characteristics, internet usage habits, and preferences of the sampled population.

2.2 Reliability and Validity Test

As depicted in Table -2, the results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) reveal that the convergent validity, as denoted by construct reliability (CR) and average variance extract (AVE), exceeds the thresholds of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively.

Table -2
The Result of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the measurement model

	Factor Loading	Construct reliability	Eigen value
EWOM Quality			
The reviews and comments posted online are clear.	0.863		
The comments and evaluations seen online make sense.	0.871		
The evaluations and comments found online are beneficial.	0.860		
The online reviews and feedback are credible.	0.752	0.876	1.752
The online reviews and feedback provide enough justification for the viewpoint.	0.782		
Each internet review and remark is generally of good quality.	0.755		
EWOM Volume			
The volume of internet reviews and comments suggests that the product is well-liked.	0.873	0.853	1.746
The volume of reviews and comments found online is significant, suggesting that the product has strong sales.	0.846		
Highly rated and recommended reviews, imply that the product has a solid reputation.	0.768		
Sender Knowledge			
I believe the people who posted evaluations and comments online are knowledgeable.	0.882	0.850	1.684
I believe that those who posted internet evaluations and comments have a wealth of product expertise.	0.876		
I believe the people who posted reviews and comments online possess judgment.	0.812		
The thoughts presented here are distinct from those offered by other sources.	0.761		
Some points that this individual brought up that I hadn't thought about.	0.752		
Product Intention			

Reading internet reviews and comments makes me want to purchase the goods.	0.884	0.869	1.728
I'll think about purchasing the product after reading an internet review or remark.	0.879		
I'm going to attempt the good or service mentioned in the web review or remark.	0.872		
I'll look for the good or service mentioned in the web review or remark in the future.	0.860		
I want to purchase the item that was the subject of the online review or remark in the future.	0.844		
Product Participation			
In my opinion, the product is quite important while looking for online reviews and comments.	0.873	0.842	1.673
When I look for online reviews and comments, I believe the product to be crucial.	0.870		
I consider the product to be valuable to me when I search for internet reviews and comments.	0.867		
I consider the thing to be important to me when I check for internet reviews and comments.	0.849		
When I search for internet evaluations and comments, I feel drawn to the product.	0.765		
I am interested in the goods when I search for internet reviews and comments.	0.820		
Brand Image			
The brand is Secure.	0.817	0.784	1.569
The brand is dependable.	0.824		
The brand is of high quality.	0.808		
The brand is interesting.	0.739		
The brand makes me feel joyful.	0.746		

2.3 The Structure Model's Fit Test for Goodness of Fit

AMOS was used to build the model, and Table -3 shows the structural model's goodness-of-fit outcomes. These findings suggest that the model does a good job of fitting the data. In particular, there is a good match as evidenced by the chi-squared statistic (χ^2) of 367.891 with 2.485 degrees of freedom (df) and a p-value less than 0.000. Furthermore, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.057, the normed fit index (NFI) is 0.909, and the comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.914. All of these fit indices fall within reasonable bounds, indicating that the structural model as a whole provides a strong match to the data.

Table -3
The effectiveness of the structure model's fit

Goodness fitting of a model	Preferred outcome	Value
CMIN/DF	<3	2.835
GFI	>0.9	0.902
AGFI	>0.8	0.883
RMR	<0.5	0.036
RMSEA	<0.08	0.057
NFI	(0,1) and approaches 1	0.909
RFI	(0,1) and approaches 1	0.902
IFI	(0,1) and approaches 1	0.914
CFI	(0,1) and approaches 1	0.914

Hypothesis Test

As can be seen in Table 1.3, the outcome shows that pathways for H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

		E. W	S. E	C.R	P -Value
H1: EWom Quality	Purchase intention	0.452	0.051	8.626	***
H2: EWom Volume	Purchase intention	0.436	0.045	7.947	***
H3: Sender Knowledge	Purchase intention	0.385	0.047	5.563	**

E.W -Estimate weight ***p-value <0.001, **p-value <0.05, *p-value <0.1

The Moderating Effect

Table -4 shows the results of Hypotheses 4a, 4b, and 4c as well as Hypotheses 5a, 5b, and 5c with regard to the moderating impact. The association between eWOM and purchase intention can be moderated by product participation and brand perception.

Table -4
Brand Image and Product Involvement

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
EWom Quality	0.508***	0.487***	
EWom Volume	0.427***	0.442***	
Sender Knowledge	0.258	0.351**	
Product Participation		0.406	
EWom Quality x Product Participation		0.198	
EWom Volume x Product Participation		0.205	
Sender Knowledge x Product Participation		0.283**	
Brand Image			0.278***
EWom Quality x Brand Image			0.196**
EWom Volume x Brand Image			0.105*
Sender Knowledge x Brand Image			0.063*
R ²	0.537	0.298	0.362
ΔR ² (Changed R ²)	0.526	0.288	0.335
F value	29.361***	22.714***	18.683***
Durbin -Watson(D-W)	2.348	2.153	2.217

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to delve into the evolving landscape of consumer behavior in the digital age, specifically focusing on the impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on purchase intention. Employing the Structural Equation Model (SEM), the research underscores the necessity for marketers to grasp how eWOM shapes consumer decisions in light of the substantial growth in online communication. The findings reveal that consumers, particularly those grappling with uncertainty regarding a product, turn to online comments as a source of guidance. Accessing online comments not only helps alleviate uncertainty but also bolsters consumer confidence in their purchase decisions. Crucially, the study highlights that the quality of eWOM matters greatly—clear, logical, and persuasive comments backed by specific product-related facts exert a pronounced positive influence on purchase intention. Moreover, the study uncovers a noteworthy moderating effect wherein the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention is influenced by factors such as the consumer's level of product involvement and perceptions of brand image. This study provides valuable insights for marketers aiming to harness eWOM effectively and tailor their strategies to align with consumer preferences and engagement levels.

This study offers several practical implications that underscore the significance of effectively managing online consumer reviews. The key findings highlight the dual role of online word of mouth as both sources of information and recommendations, suggesting that businesses can strategically leverage this channel for communication purposes. To implement this strategy, online sellers, for instance, can design review formats that encourage reviewers to contribute high-quality content, with a particular focus on serving the informative role of online consumer reviews. This approach aims to enhance consumers' understanding of a product and guide their purchase decisions more effectively. Furthermore, the research provides valuable insights for corporations looking to incorporate electronic word of mouth into their strategic marketing efforts, enabling them to attract new customers.

Interpersonal communication is more important than conventional marketing strategies. The exchange of products, ideas, views, and many types of information is

facilitated by communication. It also has a crucial function in developing supportive connections with people and relationships that are marked by loyalty and a sense of duty to one another.

The ability to develop strong customer connections may be attributed to its knowledge base. Furthermore, the organisation bears the obligation of taking significant measures depending on the information that consumers voluntarily supply.

However, it's essential to bear in mind that electronic word of mouth is predominantly consumer-generated, and marketers, in principle, play a secondary role, marketers should exercise caution when attempting to influence electronic word of mouth and be mindful of the associated risks.

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