

Electronic Word of Mouth and Its Effects on Consumer Decision-Making: Insights from an Extensive Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive literature review critically examines the pervasive influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) on consumer decision-making. Distilling insights from over a hundred scholarly articles spanning the last decade, this paper aims to map out how E-WoM impacts purchasing behaviors across diverse sectors. Methodologically, the review adopts a systematic approach to identify, analyze, and synthesize existing research, providing a robust evaluation of E-WoM's effects through both quantitative and qualitative lenses. Findings indicate that E-WoM significantly shapes consumer perceptions and buying decisions, moderated by source credibility, message sentiment, and consumer involvement. The study's major contributions include a proposed integrative model that links E-WoM dynamics with consumer decision-making processes, offering a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms at play. This model clarifies the pathways through which E-WoM exerts its influence and highlights the role of digital platforms in amplifying consumer voices. Furthermore, the paper identifies critical gaps in current research, particularly in the areas of cross-cultural variations and the influence of emerging technologies. By bridging these gaps, this review serves as a foundational resource for academics and practitioners alike, guiding future research trajectories and informing strategic marketing practices in the digital era.

Keywords: EWOM, Purchasing Decisions, Literacy

INTRODUCTION

Technology facilitates information search and retrieval by digitizing word-of-mouth (WOM) literacy and enhancing purchasing decisions. In the digital age, word of mouth (WOM) is referred to as Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) is the online sharing of ideas, experiences, and recommendations for products or services (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). With the rise of the internet and social media, eWOM has become a significant influence in consumer decision making (Fatima et al., 2024). Consumers can now read and contribute to customer articulations online, which can have a substantial impact on their purchasing decisions (Azer, 2022).

One of the reasons for reading eWOM is to acquire reliable information. Consumers may lose faith in the veracity of information on certain platforms, such as TikTok, and turn to eWOM to collect more accurate information before making purchasing decisions (Zhou et al., 2023). The internet provides numerous consumer opinion forums where customers can share their thoughts and experiences with others, allowing for eWOM communication (Akbari, 2022). The motivations for engaging in eWOM can vary. Research has found four motivations for eWOM: benevolence, self-improvement, societal gain, and emotional release (Ramadhan, 2022). Consumers may participate in eWOM to assist others in making the best decisions (altruism), to better their own self-image (self-enhancement), to get social benefits such as recognition or a sense of belonging (social benefits), or to express and relieve their emotions (emotional release) (Yang, 2022).

eWOM has a substantial impact on consumer decision-making. Research shows that eWOM can influence purchasing intentions and brand image (Sun, 2021). Positive or negative words made by potential customers, existing customers, or past customers about a product or company via eWOM can have a significant impact on the purchase intentions of other consumers (Yu et al., 2021). Consumer views and purchasing inclinations are also influenced by the quantity and quality of electronic word of mouth (Davari & Strutton, 2014). The significance of eWOM extends beyond particular products and services. eWOM has been reported to influence the hotel and tourism industries as well (San-Martin et al., 2020). Consumers frequently use eWOM to make judgments

about hotels, restaurants, and tourism locations. Positive ratings and suggestions can considerably impact the decisions of future tourists (Silalahi & Fahham, 2023).

eWOM has emerged as a key instrument in consumer decision-making. Consumers use eWOM to obtain information, seek recommendations, and make informed decisions. The incentives for participating in eWOM can vary, but the influence on purchase intentions and brand image is important. As the internet evolves, eWOM will undoubtedly continue to alter consumer behavior and influence business success. The Covid-19 epidemic has had a profound impact on many parts of people's lives, including their purchasing decisions. With limitations on physical encounters and growing reliance on online platforms, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged as an essential influence in online purchasing decisions (Dehghani et al., 2023). eWOM is the propagation of opinions, experiences, and recommendations regarding products or services via online platforms.

One of the primary advantages of eWOM in the post-Covid-19 era is the capacity to obtain reliable information. During the epidemic, consumers encountered difficulties in evaluating items or services due to limited physical encounters and the inability to rely on usual sources of information (Sharma & Arora, 2023). eWOM provides a forum for consumers to get knowledge from other consumers who have experienced the product or service, allowing them to make more educated selections. (Al-Okaily, 2023). eWOM also helps to develop confidence and credibility in online purchasing. The pandemic has caused an upsurge in internet fraud and fraudulent activities, making consumers more cautious about online purchases (Patel et al., 2023). Positive EWOM can assist reduce these fears by offering social proof and comfort that the product or service is dependable and trustworthy. (Kameswara & Respati, 2022) Consumers are more likely to believe comments and experiences expressed by other consumers, which enhances their confidence in their purchasing decisions (Do, 2023).

Based on the preceding, it is possible to conclude that eWOM significantly alters user perceptions and purchasing decisions. To leverage this solid type of online communication, firms must first grasp the motivations behind eWOM, its effect on brand perception, and its significance in diverse industries. This study collates and synthesizes the existing research on E-WoM, offering a structured overview encompassing various industries and cultural contexts. By doing so, it provides a holistic view of the current understanding of E-WoM's impact on consumer purchasing decisions. Through meticulous analysis, this article highlights critical gaps in the current literature, particularly in E-WoM's cross-cultural effectiveness, its impact on different product types, and the moderating role of consumer traits. Addressing these gaps can pave the way for future empirical studies.

This review proposes a refined theoretical framework that integrates the dual-process theory and the theory of reasoned action to explain the cognitive and emotional pathways through which E-WoM influences purchasing decisions. This framework can serve as a foundation for future research to explore the nuanced mechanisms of E-WoM. By elucidating the relationship between E-WoM and consumer behavior, this study offers actionable insights for marketers to optimize their strategies to harness the power of E-WoM more effectively. It also provides recommendations for leveraging digital platforms to amplify positive consumer feedback. The article concludes with a discussion on promising areas for future research, including the role of artificial intelligence in automating the detection and analysis of E-WoM, and its potential to personalize consumer interactions at scale. This contribution to the literature not only updates the academic community on the status of E-WoM research but also equips practitioners with updated insights to better navigate the digital marketplace.

METHODS

The method used in this research is Literature Review of 55 Scopus-indexed Reputable International Journal articles from 2020 to 2023.

RESULT

What is e-WOM and how is it measured?

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is the communication of ideas, experiences, or recommendations regarding products or services via online platforms (Mainolfi, 2022) . It refers to statements made by future, present, or past consumers that might affect the purchasing decisions and intentions of others (López, 2022). eWOM plays a significant influence in creating brand image and

buy intentions in the consumer market (Hancock, 2023). Consumers frequently use eWOM to collect knowledge about products, which can impact their purchase behavior (Simay et al., 2023).

Research indicates that eWOM can have a direct impact on brand trust and repurchase propensity (Yusuf, 2018). Furthermore, eWOM can influence consumer purchasing decisions by affecting perceived ease of use, content marketing, and brand image (Rahman, 2018). The reliability of online opinions in eWOM is critical for the adoption of knowledge in the online environment (Hodeghatta, 2016). Additionally, eWOM can mediate the relationship between corporate social responsibility and perceived quality, underlining its significance in consumer perceptions (Grazzini et al., 2020). The influence of eWOM extends to many industries, such as tourism and hospitality, where it has been observed to alter destination image and visitor decisions (Garg & Pandey, 2020). Instagram and TikTok have been highlighted as mediums that facilitate e-word-of-mouth communication, influencing brand image and buy intentions (Kasabov, 2016). Additionally, the motivations for consumers partaking in eWOM include benevolence, social advantages, and expressing feelings (Bento et al., 2018). Researchers employed several approaches and metrics to assess electronic word of mouth (eWOM). For instance, research was done by (Sharma & Arora, 2023) employed a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to assess eWOM, brand image, and purchase intent. This strategy allows you to accurately quantify the influence of eWOM on brand image and purchase intent.

Furthermore, the success of eWOM can be examined through its impact on consumer behavior, including purchasing decisions and purchase intention (Hermawan et al., 2022). Analyzing the effects of eWOM on customer behavior enables academics to better understand its reach and effectiveness in changing consumer perceptions and decisions. Furthermore, reasons that drive consumers to engage in eWOM, such as charity, self-improvement, social benefits, and expressing emotions, can be markers of eWOM. (Ahmad & Febrina, 2018). Understanding these reasons sheds light on why consumers engage in eWOM activities and how they influence the spread of information via electronic channels. Furthermore, researchers can analyze the role of eWOM in mediating the relationship between variables such as brand trust, brand image, and purchase intention, to determine the indirect impact of eWOM on customer perceptions and behaviour (Berliana & Nurlinda, 2022). This mediation analysis provides insight into the ways by which eWOM influences consumer decision-making processes.

What is a Purchase Decision and how is it measured?

Purchasing decisions refers to the process by which consumers make choices about purchasing products or services supplied by suppliers. (Galati et al., 2021). This encompasses a range of aspects, such as product quality, pricing, brand image, and service quality, that impact the final choice to buy or not buy a specific item (Oktavian & Wahyudi, 2022). Consumers participate in purchase decisions as a problem-solving strategy to satisfy their desires and requirements by selecting products that suit their preferences and needs (Rahmawati & Fitriani, 2021).

Service quality, trust, store atmosphere, social considerations, and emotional responses can all have an impact on purchasing decisions (Dewobroto & Wijaya, 2022). These aspects influence consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior. Furthermore, consumer participation in the decision-making process, perceived value, as well as the influence of promotions and consumer preferences, can influence purchasing decisions (Zaichkowsky, 1985) (Hafizi & Ali, 2021). Furthermore, purchasing decisions are frequently impacted by external factors such as social media marketing, brand awareness, promotions, and product innovation (Y. Liu et al., 2018); (Astary & Kodrat, 2021) (Malelak et al., 2021). Consumers may also consider lifestyle, brand reputation, and halal information when making purchasing selections. These elements all influence a consumer's inclination to buy and the final decision-making process.

Measuring purchase decisions requires a variety of methodologies and scales to evaluate consumer behavior and decision-making processes. One technique, as demonstrated by (Hanaysha, 2018), is to utilize a five-item scale developed from to assess purchase decisions in the context of consumer behavior. This scale enables researchers to accurately measure the elements that influence purchasing decisions. Additionally, (Foxall & Pallister, 1998) explores the use of specific measures, such as the Mittal and Mittal scales, to measure involvement in financial service purchasing decisions.

This scale provides a formal framework for assessing customer engagement and participation in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, (Fetai et al., 2017) classified respondents' purchasing or non-purchasing decisions using a dichotomous (binary) measure. This direct technique simplifies the measurement of purchasing decisions by grouping consumer choices as separate outcomes. Additionally, studies such as (R. Singh & Nayak, 2014) have employed structural equation modeling to investigate the impact of peer interactions and long-term product involvement on family purchasing decisions. This method enables a full study of the elements influencing purchasing decisions in a social context.

The Relationship between E-WOM and Purchasing Decisions

Social media influencers, as eWOM actors, can have a substantial impact on consumer purchase decisions. According to research (Wandoko, 2022), social media influencers frequently utilize things that fit their lifestyle and post reviews on their social media profiles, impacting consumer impressions of products and brands. In addition, (S. Singh & Gupta, 2021) noted that opinions regarding social media influencers have an impact on consumer purchase behavior. A good attitude toward influencers increases the possibility that consumers will be affected by their recommendations and material.

Additionally, (Wandoko, 2022) analyzes how the ongoing expansion of social media platforms has altered the consumption of various products and services. Social media influencers, particularly on sites such as TikTok, can present products in a way that resonates with Generation Z consumers, leading to impulse purchases. Furthermore, (Wang et al., 2017) demonstrate that customers frequently use social media platforms, particularly influencer material, to make purchasing decisions. Influencers' reviews, recommendations, and lifestyle portrayals can shape consumer perceptions and urge people to make specific purchasing decisions.

Online reviews play a significant part in customer decision-making. Online reviews can influence how consumers perceive product quality, trust, and overall satisfaction. Positive reviews can boost consumer confidence in a product or service, leading to increased purchase intentions. In addition, (Syifa Rofifa Putri Rizq & Istyakara Muslichah, 2023) underlined that internet reviews serve as a source of information for consumers, assisting them in making informed judgments about products and services. Consumers frequently rely on the experiences and opinions published in internet reviews to determine the reliability and quality of a product before making a purchase.

In addition study undertaken by (Zhang, 2020) shows how online reviews might impact consumer behavior, particularly in the e-commerce sector. Positive reviews can serve as social proof, verifying a product's quality and worth in the eyes of potential purchasers and, as a result, influencing their purchases. Furthermore, (Z. Liu & Park, 2015) demonstrate that the volume and mood of online reviews can significantly influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes regarding a product. Consumers are more likely to trust products with a high number of positive evaluations, which influences their decision-making process. Based on these ideas, I propose that eWOM will have a positive impact on purchase decisions. Based on the theoretical basis, the conceptual model of the interaction between eWOM and purchasing decisions in this research is as follows:



Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Relationship between eWOM and Purchasing Decisions

CONCLUSION

This review underscores Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) critical role as a powerful tool in the digital marketing arsenal, capable of significantly influencing consumer behavior, shaping brand perceptions, and driving purchasing decisions across diverse industries. The strategic integration and management of E-WoM within marketing campaigns are essential for harnessing its full potential to affect consumer choices and brand loyalty. Through various methodologies, including scales and analytical models, the profound impact of E-WoM on consumer behavior and its mediating roles in brand-related dynamics are thoroughly evaluated, highlighting its pivotal importance in the

digital landscape. Furthermore, purchasing decisions are complex and influenced by product quality, price, brand awareness, and promotional activities. A nuanced understanding of these elements is crucial for businesses aiming to adapt their marketing strategies to align with evolving consumer preferences and market demands. Advanced analytical methods, including structural equation modeling, are instrumental in dissecting the intricacies of consumer behavior and decision-making processes, providing insights into how various factors collectively impact purchasing decisions.

Lastly, social media influencers' influence as conduits of E-WoM is profound. Their ability to craft engaging content, build trust, and authentically present products plays a transformative role in modifying consumer behavior and decision-making patterns. Online reviews, as a form of E-WoM, are instrumental in molding consumer perceptions, fostering trust, and guiding purchasing decisions. Consumers increasingly depend on the shared experiences and opinions found in online reviews to make informed purchase choices, emphasizing the need for brands to actively engage and monitor these digital conversations. In summary, E-WoM emerges not only as a catalyst for commercial success but also as a critical element in the fabric of modern consumer engagement strategies, necessitating careful and strategic management to leverage its full potential.

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