



From Opinions to Decisions: Understanding the Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth on Consumer Behavior

Ravikant Kishorbhai Padhiyar ^{Author 1}

(Research Scholar, Gujarat Technological University - Ahmedabad),

Prof. (Dr.) Vikas Arora ^{Author 2}

(PhD Supervisor, Gujarat Technological University - Ahmedabad and Director, Sunshine Group of Institutions - Rajkot)

Corresponding Author: Prof. (Dr.) Vikas Arora

Abstract

In the digital age, consumers are increasingly influenced by electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which refers to the online reviews, comments, ratings, and recommendations shared through digital platforms. Like traditional word of mouth, eWOM has a wider reach, greater accessibility, & longer-lasting visibility, making it a critical determinant in consumer decision-making. This paper examines the transition from online opinions to concrete purchasing decisions, analyzing how eWOM influences perceptions, trust, and consumer attitudes toward products and services. Drawing on theories of consumer behavior, social influence, and digital communication, the study highlights the psychological and social mechanisms through which electronic word of mouth (eWOM) operates. Furthermore, it discusses the credibility of online reviews, the role of positive versus negative eWOM, and the moderating impact of demographics, cultural background, and technological literacy. The findings suggest that eWOM significantly reduces information asymmetry, enhances consumer confidence, and accelerates purchase intentions; however, excessive reliance on digital reviews may lead to biases or misinformation. This paper contributes to the understanding of digital consumer behavior and provides insights for marketers, businesses, and policymakers to strategically leverage eWOM in designing effective communication and branding strategies.

Keyword: Electronic Word of Mouth, Consumer Behavior, Online Reviews, Purchase Intention, Trust and Credibility, Social Media Influence

Introduction

Electronic word of mouth - Consumer decision-making has undergone a paradigm shift in recent decades. Traditionally, individuals relied on personal experiences, direct recommendations from family and friends, or expert opinions when making purchasing decisions. However, with the expansion of the internet and the rise of Web 2.0 technologies, consumers now have access to vast amounts of user-generated content (UGC). One of the most significant forms of UGC is **electronic word of mouth**, which allows people to share their experiences and evaluations of products and services through online platforms such as review websites, social media, and e-commerce portals.

Unlike traditional word of mouth, which is restricted to small social circles, eWOM is borderless, persistent, and instantly accessible to a global audience. Reviews on platforms like Flipkart, Amazon, Trip Advisor, or

Zomato, as well as user comments on YouTube or Instagram, have become essential sources of information for consumers. In fact, recent market surveys suggest that more than 80% of consumers consult online reviews before making purchase decisions, demonstrating the central role of eWOM in contemporary consumer behavior.

Consumer Behavior – It refers to the **actions, decisions, and thought processes** individuals (or groups) go through when selecting, purchasing, using, or disposing of goods and services.

It helps answer questions like:

- Why do people choose one brand over another?
- How do emotions, culture, or peer pressure affect buying decisions?
- What role does advertising play in shaping consumer choices?

Online Review – It is written evaluations or ratings posted by consumers on digital platforms (like Amazon, Google, Yelp, or social media) based on their experience with a **product, service, or brand**.

They typically include:

- A **star rating** (e.g., 1–5 stars)
- A **written comment** (detailing satisfaction or dissatisfaction)
- Sometimes, images or videos of the product in use

Power of Electronic word of mouth:

- **Credibility & Trust:** Consumers trust peer opinions more than brand advertisements. Online reviews and ratings are often seen as more authentic.
- **Reach & Speed:** Unlike traditional WOM, eWOM can spread instantly to a global audience.
- **Permanence:** Reviews, comments, and ratings stay online, continuously influencing new potential buyers.
- **Volume of Opinions:** The sheer quantity of reviews adds weight to decision-making.

Electronic word of mouth's Impact on Purchase Decisions:

☐ Awareness **Stage**

- eWOM exposes consumers to new brands and products through recommendations, social media shares, and influencer content.

☐ Evaluation **Stage**

- Consumers compare products based on online reviews, star ratings, and experiences shared by others.
- Positive eWOM reduces perceived risk; negative eWOM can deter purchase.

☐ Purchase **Stage**

- High ratings and favorable reviews increase purchase likelihood.
- Negative comments can lead to abandonment of purchase (cart drop-offs).

☐ Post-**Purchase Behavior**

- Satisfied consumers contribute further eWOM, creating a cycle of influence.

Electronic word of mouth's Examples:

- ☐ Amazon / **Flipkart:** Reviews and star ratings significantly affect sales rankings.

□ TripAdvisor / **Zomato**: Restaurant and travel decisions are heavily shaped by peer reviews.

□ **Social Media Influencers**: Recommendations on Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok strongly drive impulsive buying.

Relationship between Electronic word of mouth and Consumer Purchase Decision:

1. Information Source & Awareness

- eWOM serves as a **primary source of product information** for consumers.
- Online reviews, ratings, and peer experiences create awareness and shape perceptions about product quality.
- This directly influences whether a consumer considers a product during the **pre-purchase stage**.

2. Trust & Risk Reduction

- Consumers trust eWOM more than advertisements because it comes from **real users**.
- Positive eWOM reduces **perceived risk** (financial, performance, or social), encouraging purchase.
- Negative eWOM increases uncertainty and can delay or prevent purchase decisions.

3. Attitude Formation

- eWOM shapes **attitudes toward the brand or product** by providing collective social proof.
- Favorable attitudes increase purchase intention, while unfavorable attitudes discourage it.

4. Purchase Intention → Purchase Decision

- A High volume of positive reviews and ratings significantly increases **purchase intention**.
- Repeated exposure to consistent eWOM (across platforms) strengthens consumer confidence, leading to an actual purchase.

5. Post-Purchase Behavior & Feedback Loop

- After purchase, consumers themselves generate eWOM (reviews, social posts).
- This creates a **feedback loop**, where earlier eWOM influenced their decision, and now their experience influences others' purchase decisions.

Importance of the Study:

Understanding how eWOM influences consumer behavior is crucial for both academic research and business practice. For consumers, online opinions serve as a tool to reduce uncertainty and minimize the risk associated with purchasing unfamiliar products or services. For marketers and organizations, eWOM presents both opportunities and challenges: while positive reviews can enhance brand reputation and sales, negative feedback can quickly damage credibility and reduce market share.

Moreover, in the era of digital marketing, eWOM has become a low-cost yet highly effective communication strategy. Businesses increasingly collaborate with influencers, encourage customer reviews, and monitor online sentiments to manage their digital reputation. Thus, studying eWOM not only deepens our theoretical understanding of consumer psychology but also provides actionable insights for competitive advantage.

Problem Statement:

Despite the increasing prevalence of eWOM, its exact impact on consumer decision-making remains complex and multifaceted. Consumers are often exposed to contradictory reviews, fabricated testimonials, or

biased influencer endorsements, which may distort perceptions. Additionally, the effect of eWOM varies depending on the consumer's trust level, cultural values, and prior experiences. This raises critical questions:

- How do consumers interpret online opinions when making purchase decisions?
- What factors enhance or diminish the credibility of eWOM?
- To what extent does eWOM influence actual consumer behavior compared to traditional marketing tools?

Addressing these questions is vital for understanding the dynamics of modern markets and the psychology of digital consumers.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine how eWOM credibility, consistency, and review valence affect purchase intention.
- To analyze the impact of gender and generational differences on trust in eWOM.
- To study the influence of eWOM on brand image across digital platforms.
- To explore the role of emerging technologies (AI, AR, VR) in enhancing eWOM effectiveness.

Research Significance:

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. From an academic perspective, it extends consumer behavior models by integrating digital communication dynamics. From a managerial perspective, it offers insights into managing online reviews, building trust, and mitigating the risks of negative publicity. As digital markets expand, understanding eWOM becomes a strategic necessity for firms across industries, from retail and hospitality to healthcare and financial services.

Literature Review:

1. Effect of electronic word of mouth on consumer purchase intention: The perspective of gender differences, Fan, Y.-W., & Miao, Y.-F. (2012) – Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a critical determinant of consumer purchase behavior in the context of e-commerce. Online reviews serve as a vital source of information, enabling consumers to assess product credibility, mitigate perceived risks, and make informed purchasing decisions. Fan and Miao (2012) applied the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to investigate how consumer expertise, involvement, and rapport influence the perceived credibility, acceptance, and utilization of eWOM within virtual communities. Their findings indicate that involvement exerts the strongest effect on eWOM credibility, which subsequently plays a significant role in shaping purchase intention. Furthermore, the study identifies gender as a moderating factor: male consumers primarily rely on involvement when evaluating eWOM, whereas female consumers additionally consider expertise and rapport. Overall, the results demonstrate that eWOM credibility directly fosters consumer trust, acceptance, and purchase intention, although the magnitude of its influence varies across genders. This research advances the understanding of online consumer behavior by elucidating how personal and social factors mediate the effectiveness of eWOM in purchase decision-making.

2. The impact of electronic word of mouth on consumers' purchasing decisions, Almana, A. M., & Mirza, A. A. (2013) - Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a pivotal determinant of consumer purchase behavior in digital marketplaces. Empirical evidence consistently shows that eWOM fosters consumer trust, mitigates perceived risks, and exerts a substantial influence on purchase intention. Fan and Miao (2012), in the *International Journal of Electronic Business Management*, employed an extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to analyze the antecedents of eWOM credibility. Their study revealed that consumer expertise, involvement, and rapport significantly shape perceived eWOM credibility, which in turn drives both eWOM acceptance and purchase intention. Notably, gender differences were found to moderate these effects: female consumers placed greater emphasis on credibility and rapport, whereas male consumers were predominantly influenced by involvement. Complementing these insights, Almana and Mirza (2013), writing in the *International Journal of Computer Applications*, reported that more than 80%

of consumers in Saudi Arabia consult online reviews prior to purchase. Their findings further highlighted that review-related attributes—such as consistency, recency, volume, and the credibility of both the reviewer and the hosting platform—play a decisive role in shaping consumer evaluations. Collectively, the literature affirms a strong positive relationship between eWOM and purchase decisions while demonstrating that its influence is contingent upon demographic, cultural, and contextual variables. These insights underscore the strategic importance for businesses to proactively manage online feedback ecosystems and cultivate credible eWOM to enhance purchase intention across diverse consumer segments.

3. Impact of Electronic Word on Mouth on Consumer Behavior and Brand Image, Dr. Shiv Kumar Sharma^{1*}, Anuja Shukla². (2017) - The rapid evolution of internet technologies has fundamentally reshaped consumer shopping behavior. Innovations such as smartphones and high-speed mobile internet (e.g., 4G) have facilitated the widespread adoption of e-commerce, prompting a shift from traditional offline purchasing to online transactions. In this digital environment, consumers increasingly rely on product evaluations shared by other users across websites, forums, and social media platforms—collectively known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM)—to make informed purchase decisions.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of eWOM on sales performance, limited research has explored its influence on the purchase intentions of young consumers, particularly in relation to well-known clothing brands. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the role of eWOM and brand image in shaping purchase intentions among young consumers. Data were collected from undergraduate students and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

The results indicate that eWOM exerts a strong effect on brand image but a comparatively weaker direct influence on purchase intention. In contrast, brand image emerges as a key determinant of purchase intention. These findings offer important implications for marketers, highlighting the need to leverage eWOM not merely as a direct persuasion tool but as a mechanism for enhancing brand image, thereby fostering stronger consumer commitment and purchase intent.

4. A Literature Review of Word of Mouth and Electronic Word of Mouth: Implications for Consumer Behavior, Nuria Huete-Alcocer. (2017) - The proliferation of the Internet has given rise to a new form of word of mouth communication: electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which has become one of the most powerful informal influence mechanisms among consumers and businesses alike. Building on this premise, the present paper provides a comprehensive literature review examining the impact of both traditional WOM and eWOM within the domain of consumer behavior. The analysis highlights key distinctions between the two communication modes—particularly in terms of reach, accessibility, interactivity, and credibility—and underscores their respective roles in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase decisions. By synthesizing current scholarship, this review seeks to enhance understanding of the comparative potential of WOM and eWOM, offering valuable insights for researchers and practitioners seeking to leverage recommendation-based communication strategies effectively.

5. Electronic Word of mouth versus Word of mouth in the Field of Consumer Behavior: A Literature Review, Abbas N. Albarq¹, Mohammed Al Doghan². (2019) - The rapid expansion of the Internet has transformed traditional word of mouth (WOM) communication into its digital counterpart—electronic word of mouth (eWOM)—which now serves as a critical channel of influence for both consumers and businesses. Despite its increasing importance, the literature offers limited comparative analysis of eWOM and conventional WOM within the context of consumer behavior. Addressing this gap, the present study reviews existing research to assess the impact of both traditional WOM and eWOM on consumer decision-making while delineating the key distinctions between these two forms of communication. The review is confined to English-language publications, with studies in other languages intentionally excluded to maintain consistency in interpretation. In addition, the paper identifies emerging research avenues to guide future scholarly inquiry into this evolving domain..

6. A Study On Impact Of Ewom (Electronic Word Of Mouth) On Consumers' Buying Decision, Dr. Ankur Amin. (2019) - Word of mouth (WOM) has long been acknowledged as a critical factor influencing marketing strategies and consumer decision-making. With the proliferation of the Internet and the expansion of social media, traditional WOM has evolved into electronic word of mouth (eWOM), encompassing all

informal, consumer-generated communications disseminated via digital platforms concerning products, services, or brands. Prior research indicates that online consumer reviews constitute a vital source of information, enabling consumers to assess eWOM credibility and make informed purchase decisions. Numerous studies have documented the significant impact of online reviews on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, particularly in high-involvement product categories such as electronics. Building on this foundation, the present study employed a survey-based descriptive research design, using structured questionnaires adapted from previously validated scales, to examine the effect of eWOM on consumer purchasing behavior. The findings consistently demonstrate that online reviews substantially influence consumer decision-making, with a large proportion of respondents relying on eWOM when selecting electronic products. Collectively, the evidence underscores that eWOM functions as a key driver of consumer behavior in digital marketplaces.

7. The Electronic Word of Mouth Analysis and Its Impact on Purchase Decisions: Studies on Millennial and Z Generation (2023) - Consumer purchase decisions are central to a company's revenue sustainability and long-term competitive advantage. Recent research has increasingly examined the role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in shaping these decisions, particularly within digital marketplaces. Studies focusing on platforms such as Shopee Food have predominantly employed quantitative methodologies, utilizing structured questionnaires with Likert-scale items to capture consumer perceptions. Evidence from samples comprising largely Millennial and Generation Z indicates that a majority of consumers actively engage with eWOM before making purchases; for instance, over 70% of respondents regularly access the Shopee Food application, and more than 90% review product information, ratings, and user feedback prior to transactions. Additionally, prior transaction experiences reveal high consumer satisfaction, with approximately 73% reporting positive outcomes. However, regression analyses demonstrate that not all aspects of eWOM contribute equally to purchase decision-making. While mere exposure to eWOM appears to have limited influence, factors such as the quality of content and the valence of opinions exert a significant combined effect, explaining roughly 30% of the variance in consumer purchase behavior. These findings highlight that the persuasive impact of eWOM depends less on frequency and more on the credibility, informativeness, and tone of the shared consumer experiences.

8. The impact of eWOM information in social media on the online purchase intention of Generation Z, Thi Thuy An Ngo, Binh Long Vuong, My Dien Le, Thanh Trung Nguyen, My My Tran & Quoc Khanh Nguyen (2024) - Research on Generation Z consumers highlights that specific characteristics of electronic word of mouth (eWOM)—notably information quality, credibility, and quantity—significantly influence online purchase intentions on social media platforms. Empirical studies employing quantitative methods and structural equation modeling indicate that information quality exerts the strongest positive effect on both perceived information usefulness and subsequent information adoption. Moreover, consumer-related factors, such as the need for information and attitudes toward information, further strengthen these relationships. The findings also reveal that perceived information usefulness enhances information adoption, which subsequently drives purchase intention, functioning as a partial mediator between eWOM attributes and consumer decision-making. Collectively, the literature underscores the critical role of high-quality eWOM content in shaping the online purchasing behavior of young consumers.

9. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on social networking sites (SNS): Roles of information credibility in shaping online purchase intention, Thi Thuy An Ngo *, Chi Thanh Bui , Huynh Khanh Long Chau , Nguyen Phuc Nguyen Tran (2024) - Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on social networking platforms plays a pivotal role in shaping consumers' online purchase intentions, primarily through user-generated content and peer recommendations. Studies applying the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and Information Acceptance Model (IACM) demonstrate that factors such as information credibility, perceived usefulness, adoption, and attitudes toward information significantly influence consumer behavior. Empirical research employing quantitative surveys and PLS-SEM analysis reveals that while information credibility strongly impacts both perceived usefulness and information adoption, perceived usefulness and positive attitudes alone do not directly translate into purchase intentions. Instead, information adoption emerges as the primary driver of online purchase decisions. These findings underscore the necessity for marketers to enhance the credibility and engagement of eWOM content in order to effectively influence consumer behavior within digital marketplaces.

10. Understanding Consumer Behavior in Marketing Management: A Descriptive Study and Review of Literature, Suca Rusdian¹, Jajang Sugiat², Yusuf Tojiri³ , (2024) - Consumer behavior in marketing

is shaped by a complex interplay of individual, social, cultural, and technological factors. Research across psychology, sociology, and marketing indicates that personal characteristics, including personality traits and values, significantly influence consumer preferences and purchasing behavior. Social influences, such as reference groups, social networks, and social identity, further guide decision-making processes. Cultural dimensions, as conceptualized in frameworks like Hofstede's model, shape consumer attitudes and behaviors across different contexts. Concurrently, technological advancements—particularly the rise of social media and artificial intelligence—have transformed consumption patterns, creating both opportunities and challenges for marketers. A comprehensive understanding of these interrelated factors is therefore critical for designing effective marketing strategies and anticipating consumer responses in dynamic marketplaces.

11. Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (Ewom) On Consumer Behaviour and Attitude: A Systematic Analysis of Digital Influence in the Modern Marketplace, BHUPESH T K (2024) - Online reviews and ratings have a profound impact on consumer behavior in digital marketplaces. Positive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) can stimulate consumer interest and encourage further product evaluation, whereas negative eWOM may discourage potential buyers. The credibility and trustworthiness of reviews are critical in shaping purchase intentions, functioning as a form of social proof. Beyond influencing pre-purchase decisions, eWOM also affects post-purchase behavior by promoting customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. For businesses, the strategic management of eWOM—through active engagement, influencer partnerships, creation of shareable content, and continuous monitoring of feedback—can enhance brand image, address consumer concerns, and strengthen trust. Consequently, eWOM constitutes an essential element of contemporary digital marketing strategies.

Research Methodology:

1. **Research Design:** This research follows a **descriptive research design** to systematically explore and synthesize existing literature on the topic. The focus is on describing key concepts, patterns, and insights in consumer behavior and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) without manipulating variables.
2. **Data Collection:** This study is following **secondary data** sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, books & conference proceedings. Keywords used include “consumer behavior,” “eWOM,” “online reviews,” “social media marketing,” and “purchase intention.”
3. **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:**
 - **Inclusion:** Studies published in the last 13 years, focused on online consumer behavior, social media, and eWOM.
 - **Exclusion:** Non-English publications, studies unrelated to digital marketing, and research focusing solely on offline consumer behavior.
4. **Data Analysis:** The collected literature is analysed using a **descriptive synthesis approach**, identifying common themes, trends, theoretical frameworks, and findings. Key insights are organized to highlight the influence of individual, social, cultural, and technological factors on consumer decision-making.
5. **Limitations:** The study is limited by reliance on secondary sources, which may introduce publication bias. Additionally, the descriptive approach does not include primary data or statistical validation.
6. **Ethical Considerations:** All sources are properly cited to acknowledge original authors, and only publicly available or properly licensed material has been used.

Discussion and Implications:

Addressing eWOM challenges requires collaboration between businesses, digital platforms, and policymakers. Companies must recognize that credibility is a core driver of consumer trust, while consumers must be educated to critically evaluate online content. Platforms play a crucial role as intermediaries, ensuring transparency and accountability.

From a managerial perspective, proactive strategies such as promoting verified reviews, partnering with trustworthy influencers, and engaging with consumers in real-time are essential for building strong digital

reputations. From an academic perspective, these strategies highlight the evolving nature of consumer psychology in digital environments, where trust, authenticity, and transparency increasingly determine brand success.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions:

1. Conclusion

Across the reviewed literature, E-Word of Mouth (eWOM) consistently emerges as a powerful determinant of consumer behavior, significantly influencing purchase intention, brand image, information adoption, and consumer trust. Consumers across demographics—particularly Millennials and Generation Z—rely heavily on online reviews, comments, and peer experiences while making buying decisions.

The studies collectively demonstrate that credibility, consistency, recency, valence Positive/Negative, and completeness of reviews are key elements shaping consumer perceptions. Information quality and usefulness, especially when supported by trusted platforms, drive information adoption and online purchase intention. Notably, negative reviews exert a stronger influence than positive ones, especially for high-involvement or expensive products, highlighting the risk-mitigating role of eWOM.

While eWOM strongly enhances brand image, its direct effect on purchase intention may vary in strength depending on consumer involvement, platform credibility, and cultural or gender-based differences. Women and men process trust in eWOM differently, and consumers often seek confirmation through multiple platforms before committing to a purchase. Furthermore, written eWOM (online reviews, comments) is perceived as more reliable than traditional WOM due to its traceability and resistance to distortion.

The rising speed, accessibility, and visibility of eWOM—especially on social media and marketplaces—has transformed it from a supplementary information source into a primary decision-making tool. However, consumers do not always purchase immediately after exposure; many engage in exploratory browsing, using eWOM to evaluate alternatives over time.

The literature also highlights future research and managerial implications: brands must actively monitor, engage, and respond to online feedback, encourage authentic positive eWOM, and leverage influencers and interactive media. With emerging technologies like AI, AR, and VR, eWOM will further evolve into personalized, immersive decision aids.

2. Future Research Directions

While existing literature firmly establishes eWOM as a dominant force in modern consumer decision-making, future research can extend these insights by examining its long-term impact through longitudinal studies that track how sustained exposure to online reviews shapes brand loyalty and post-purchase behavior over time. With the rise of AI-generated reviews and catboat-driven recommendations, it becomes essential to investigate consumer ability to differentiate between authentic and synthetic eWOM, and how this affects perceived credibility. Cross-cultural and socioeconomic comparisons could further reveal how trust, sentiment interpretation, and risk perception vary across regions and demographic groups, helping brands tailor localized eWOM strategies. Moreover, as consumers increasingly engage with multimedia formats—such as video reviews, influencer livestreams, and immersive AR/VR shopping experiences—research should explore how these dynamic and experiential forms of eWOM influence emotional engagement and purchase intention compared to traditional text-based reviews. Psychological moderators such as personality traits, decision fatigue, and scepticism also warrant deeper exploration to understand why certain consumers are more receptive or resistant to digital persuasion. Finally, with concerns around fake reviews and deceptive practices growing, future studies should investigate effective mechanisms for fraud detection, trust restoration, and regulatory intervention, ensuring eWOM remains an ethical and reliable source of consumer influence.

3. Final Remarks

In conclusion, eWOM is no longer just a passive communication channel—it is a strategic force shaping consumer perception, trust, brand equity, and buying behavior. Brands that strategically manage and amplify credible eWOM stand to gain competitive advantage, loyalty, and long-term consumer advocacy, while neglecting it can lead to significant reputational and commercial setbacks.

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