

## "An Integrated Framework of eWOM Effects on Consumer Purchase Intention: A Systematic Literature Review"

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### Abstract

The proliferation of WEB 2.0 has completely changed the process of information sharing. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is now a crucial factor in influencing Consumer purchase intentions in several contexts. This systematic literature review aims to develop an integrated framework of eWOM effects on consumer purchase intention by synthesising existing empirical studies and theoretical models. This systematic literature review aims to develop an integrated framework of eWOM effects on consumer purchase intention by synthesising existing empirical studies and theoretical models. A comprehensive search strategy was employed across multiple academic databases, adhering to PRISMA guidelines, to identify relevant studies published over the past decade. The review examines key dimensions of eWOM, including source credibility, message quality, valence, platform type, and consumer engagement, and how these factors interact to shape purchase intentions. Additionally, the moderating and mediating roles of variables such as brand perception, consumer trust, and product involvement are explored. The findings highlight the complex interplay between various eWOM elements and provide insights into the mechanisms through which eWOM influences consumer behaviour. By proposing an integrated framework, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of eWOM's impact on purchase intentions, offering valuable implications for researchers and practitioners in the fields of marketing, consumer behaviour, and digital communication. Future research directions are also suggested to address gaps and further refine the proposed framework.

### Introduction

In the digital era, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become an increasingly significant factor influencing consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. eWOM refers to the informal communication between consumers over the internet regarding the characteristics, use, or ownership of products and services (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). Unlike traditional word of mouth, eWOM has a far-reaching impact due to the wide dissemination of consumer opinions through social media, online review platforms, and e-commerce websites (Ismagilova et al., 2020). The influence of eWOM on consumer purchase intention, which refers to the likelihood that a consumer will choose to purchase a product based on available information (Ajzen, 1991), has become a focal point in both academic research and marketing practice (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Consumers today rely heavily on eWOM when making purchasing decisions, especially for products that are complex or involve higher financial risk (Filieri & McLeay, 2014). Positive eWOM can enhance consumer trust and increase the likelihood of purchase by providing credible and relevant information (Babic Rosario et al., 2016). Conversely, negative eWOM can deter potential buyers by highlighting product deficiencies or poor service experiences, thereby posing a risk to brand reputation (Liu et al., 2019). Research has shown that the impact of eWOM on consumer purchase intention is moderated by factors such as the source credibility, message quality, and the platform where the eWOM is disseminated (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017).

Various studies have examined the elements of eWOM that influence consumer purchase intention. For instance, Filieri et al. (2018) found that the credibility of online reviews significantly impacts consumer trust and intention to purchase, particularly in the context of tourism and hospitality. Similarly, You et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis highlighting the elasticity of eWOM, suggesting that eWOM's impact varies across different product categories and market conditions. The quality of eWOM, including its informativeness, relevance, and consistency, also plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes and decision-making processes (Ismagilova et al., 2020). The interplay between these factors creates a complex environment in which eWOM can either facilitate or hinder consumer purchasing behaviour. One of the key reasons behind the growing influence of eWOM is its perceived credibility and trustworthiness compared to traditional

advertising. Consumers tend to view eWOM as more authentic and unbiased since it originates from other users who share their genuine experiences and opinions (Cheung et al., 2014). For instance, online reviews have been found to serve as a valuable information source that can reduce perceived risk and increase confidence in purchase decisions, especially in the context of high-involvement products or services (Filiéri & McLeay, 2014). The impact of eWOM is particularly pronounced in the context of experiential products, such as travel and hospitality, where consumers heavily rely on others' experiences to form their purchase intentions (Filiéri et al., 2018).

Research indicates that several factors influence the effectiveness of eWOM in shaping consumer purchase intention. Source credibility, defined as the extent to which consumers perceive the source of eWOM to be trustworthy and knowledgeable, plays a significant role in determining the impact of eWOM on consumer attitudes (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Moreover, the quality of the eWOM message, including its relevance, accuracy, and comprehensiveness, has been shown to affect how consumers process and utilize this information in their decision-making (You et al., 2015). The quantity and valence of eWOM—referring to the number of reviews and the positivity or negativity of the content—also contribute to its influence on consumer perceptions and intentions (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015).

The context in which eWOM is encountered further shapes its impact on consumer behaviour. For example, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) found that social eWOM, such as recommendations and reviews on social media platforms, significantly affects brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The platform where eWOM is shared can also moderate its influence, with consumers often perceiving reviews on established e-commerce websites as more credible and influential (You et al., 2015). Additionally, cultural and demographic factors can mediate the effect of eWOM, as consumers from different cultural backgrounds may interpret and respond to eWOM differently (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

Despite the extensive research on eWOM, the literature remains fragmented, often focusing on specific aspects such as source credibility, message quality, or platform characteristics without integrating these elements into a comprehensive framework (King et al., 2014). As the digital landscape continues to evolve, there is an increasing need to understand how the various dimensions of eWOM interact to influence consumer purchase intention in a holistic manner. This systematic literature review aims to address this gap by synthesizing research findings from 2014 to 2024, offering an integrated perspective on the complex interplay between eWOM and consumer purchase intention. Research remains fragmented, often focusing on isolated aspects such as the valence of reviews or the credibility of sources (You et al., 2015). There is a pressing need for a comprehensive framework that integrates these diverse elements to provide a more holistic understanding of how eWOM influences consumer purchase intention (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). Such a framework is crucial not only for advancing theoretical insights but also for guiding marketers and businesses in leveraging eWOM effectively within their digital marketing strategies (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

By systematically reviewing and integrating the diverse facets of eWOM research, this study seeks to develop an integrated framework that captures the multifaceted nature of eWOM's impact on consumer purchase intention. Such a framework will not only enhance theoretical understanding but also provide actionable insights for marketers and businesses aiming to leverage eWOM in their digital marketing strategies (Ismagilova et al., 2020). In an increasingly connected world where consumers' voices are amplified through digital media, understanding the dynamics of eWOM is crucial for both academia and industry. This systematic literature review aims to address this gap by synthesizing research findings from 2014 to 2024, thereby developing an integrated framework of eWOM effects on consumer purchase intention. By reviewing and consolidating the key dimensions of eWOM, this study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of its impact on consumer behaviour and provide actionable insights for practitioners in the field.

## **Reviewing and Planning the Literature: Methodology**

### **1. Search Strategy**

To conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on the effects of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase intention, a systematic search strategy was employed. Scopus database was used for data extraction. The search utilized a combination of keywords related to eWOM and consumer purchase intention, such as "electronic word of mouth," "eWOM," "consumer purchase intention,".

Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search results, ensuring the retrieval of relevant studies. The search was restricted to journal articles and conference papers published from 2014 to 2024 to capture the most recent and pertinent research on the topic.

### **2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Specific criteria were established to maintain the focus and relevance of the review:

Inclusion Criteria:

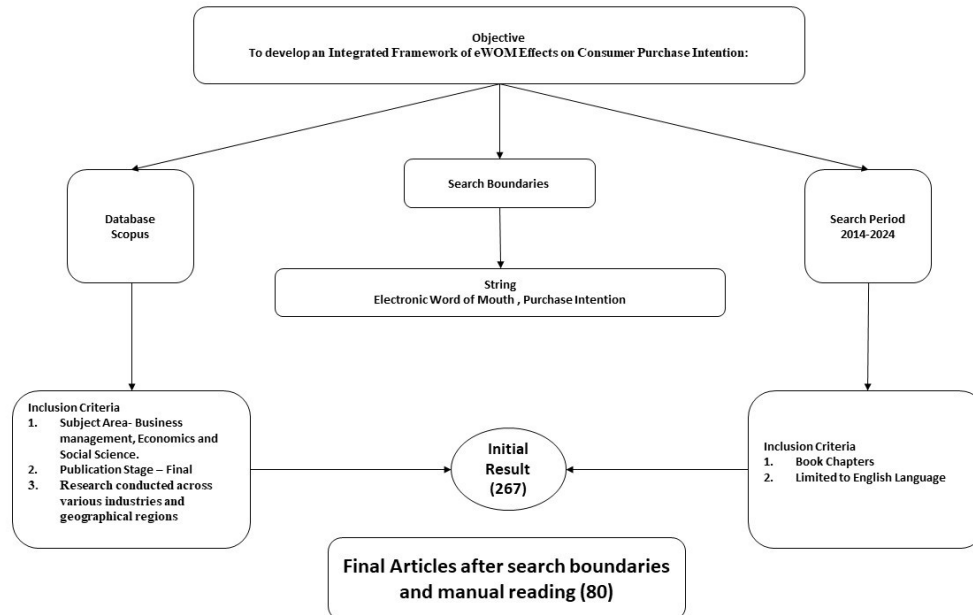
- Articles published between 2014 and 2024.
- Empirical research studies exploring the relationship between eWOM and consumer purchase intention.
- Research conducted across various industries and geographical regions to provide a diverse perspective.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Non-English language articles.
- Articles not directly addressing the impact of eWOM on consumer purchase intention.
- Opinion pieces, book reviews, and non-peer-reviewed sources.

Figure- 1 – Shows the search result, where Scopus database was considered to collect the literature. In search boundaries, "Electronic word of Mouth" AND "Purchase Intentions" was used as search string to obtained the relevant literature. Based

on the required data inclusion and exclusion filters were used. Total number of 267 documents were screened to 80 for next phase.



*Figure 1- Search Protocol*

### 3. Data Extraction and Synthesis

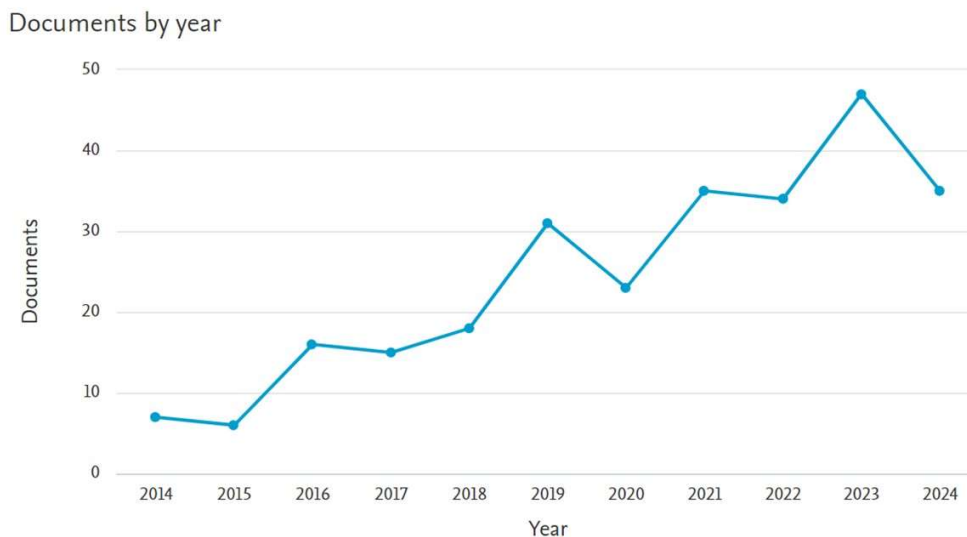
a. Data Extraction: A standardized extraction form was used to systematically collect key details from the selected studies, including study objectives, research design, sample size, methodology, key findings, and theoretical frameworks. This approach ensured consistency and accuracy in the data collection process.

b. Data Synthesis: The synthesis of the data was carried out in two stages:

- Descriptive Analysis: Summarized the characteristics of the included studies, such as publication year, research methods, and primary findings. Descriptive statistics were used to categorize and summarize the data, providing an overview of the research landscape.
- Thematic Synthesis: Identified common themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature. This process involved coding and categorizing the data to integrate findings across studies. Themes such as source credibility, message quality, eWOM valence, and contextual factors were analysed to develop a comprehensive understanding of how eWOM affects consumer purchase intention.

### Reporting and Documentation

The findings from the review were documented in a structured report, including sections on the introduction, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. The report adhered to APA style for citations and references, ensuring consistency and credibility.



*Figure 2- Publication Trend Year Wise, SOURCE- Scopus*

### Reporting and Findings

The systematic review of literature on electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and its impact on consumer purchase intention uncovers several intricate dynamics. This section delves into key themes such as the influence of source credibility, message quality, the nature of eWOM platforms, and the role of moderating factors in shaping consumer behaviour. The findings highlight how eWOM's role in consumer decision-making is both direct and complex, influenced by multiple interacting variables.

#### 1. Source Credibility

Source credibility remains a cornerstone in understanding eWOM's effectiveness. Studies have consistently demonstrated that consumers are more inclined to trust and act upon eWOM from credible sources (Cheung & Thadani, 2015). This credibility is often determined by the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and reliability of the source, whether it is an individual reviewer, a social media influencer, or an aggregate of customer ratings. For instance, social media influencers who are perceived as authentic and relatable can exert a significant impact on followers' purchase decisions (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

The importance of source credibility is further emphasized in scenarios where the source's identity and expertise are transparent. When consumers can discern that a reviewer has genuine

experience with a product or service, they are more likely to consider the review as trustworthy and credible (Filieri et al., 2018). Furthermore, peer recommendations are often seen as unbiased and thus more influential than traditional advertising, especially among younger consumers who rely heavily on peer-generated content when making purchase decisions (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

#### 2. Message Quality and Valence

The quality of eWOM messages plays a pivotal role in influencing consumer behaviour. High-quality eWOM messages are those that provide detailed, relevant, and well-structured information, enabling consumers to make informed decisions. Park and Lee (2015) found that the argument quality in online reviews significantly affects consumers' perceptions of the review's usefulness, which in turn impacts their purchase intentions. Detailed reviews that discuss both the pros and cons of a product tend to be perceived as more balanced and credible, thereby enhancing their persuasiveness.

Message valence—whether the content is positive, negative, or neutral—also critically affects consumer responses. Positive eWOM generally boosts consumer confidence and increases purchase intention (Rosario et al., 2016). However, the influence of negative eWOM is often more profound. Negative reviews can lead to risk aversion, especially for high-involvement products where the perceived risk is higher (You et al., 2015). Interestingly, some research indicates that a mix of positive and negative reviews can enhance credibility, as an all-positive review set might lead consumers to question the authenticity of the feedback (Filieri & McLeay, 2014).

#### 3. eWOM Platforms and Contextual Factors

Different eWOM platforms facilitate unique consumer interactions, impacting the effectiveness of the shared information. Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook allow for more personalized and interactive eWOM, where consumers not only receive but can also engage with the content through comments, shares, and likes. This interactive nature enhances the perceived trustworthiness and social proof of the eWOM (Ismagilova et al., 2020). For instance, a

product review shared by a friend on Facebook may be perceived as more credible than an anonymous review on a retail website due to the relational trust between the consumer and the friend.

On e-commerce platforms like Amazon, the availability of aggregated reviews and ratings provides consumers with a comprehensive overview of a product's performance. The volume of reviews and the average rating can serve as heuristic cues, influencing consumer decision-making even in the absence of in-depth content analysis (King et al., 2014). However, research has shown that while a large number of positive reviews can enhance purchase intention, an overwhelming presence of negative reviews can deter potential buyers, especially if the negative aspects highlighted are consistent across reviews (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015).

#### 4. Moderating Factors

The relationship between eWOM and consumer purchase intention is not straightforward but is moderated by various factors, including individual consumer characteristics, product type, and cultural context. For example, consumers' prior knowledge and involvement with the product category can shape how they interpret and use eWOM (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). High-involvement consumers are more likely to process eWOM information deeply and rely on it to reduce perceived uncertainty.

Cultural differences also play a significant role in eWOM effectiveness. Research suggests that consumers from collectivist cultures, which value group opinion and harmony, are more likely to be influenced by eWOM than those from individualistic cultures (Lee & Choi, 2019). Additionally, the perceived risk associated with a product moderates the eWOM-purchase intention relationship. In high-risk situations, such as purchasing expensive or complex products, consumers are more inclined to seek out and rely on eWOM as a way to mitigate uncertainty (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015).

#### 5. Psychological Mechanisms and Consumer Behaviour

Beyond the direct effects of eWOM, studies have explored the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive consumer responses to eWOM. For instance, the concept of social proof plays a crucial role, where consumers are influenced by the behaviours and opinions of others, particularly in situations of uncertainty (Cheung & Thadani, 2015). This social influence effect is especially potent in the context of social media, where consumers may conform to the perceived norms and preferences of their online communities (Hajli, 2015).

The interplay between eWOM and emotional arousal is another area of interest. Positive eWOM can evoke favourable emotions such as excitement and trust, which subsequently enhance purchase intention (King et al., 2014). Conversely, negative eWOM can trigger anxiety and doubt, leading to hesitation or avoidance of a purchase. The emotional response elicited by eWOM is particularly strong when the message contains vivid and engaging narratives, as opposed to mere factual information (Park & Kim, 2018).

#### 6. Integrated Model of eWOM Effects

Synthesizing these findings, an integrated model of eWOM effects emerges, suggesting that eWOM's impact on consumer purchase intention is contingent upon an intricate web of factors. This model includes source credibility, message quality, platform characteristics, consumer involvement, cultural context, perceived risk, and the psychological mechanisms at play. Ismagilova et al. (2020) propose that understanding eWOM's influence requires a holistic approach that considers not just the content of the message but also the broader context in which it is produced, disseminated, and consumed.

### Discussion

The findings from this systematic review reveal several key themes regarding the effects of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase intention. These results underscore the intricate interplay between source credibility, message quality, the platform through which eWOM is disseminated, and individual consumer characteristics. In this section, the theoretical and practical implications are discussed, followed by an evaluation of research limitations and directions for future studies.

#### 1. Theoretical Implications

This review supports and extends several theoretical models related to consumer behaviour and information processing. The **Source Credibility Theory** (Hovland et al., 1953) continues to hold relevance in the digital age, as consumers prioritize reviews and recommendations from credible sources when forming purchase intentions. As observed in various studies, the trustworthiness and expertise of the message source—whether a peer, an influencer, or an anonymous reviewer—remain crucial in determining the persuasiveness of eWOM (Filieri et al., 2018; You et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)** (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which explains the dual routes of persuasion—central and peripheral—aligns with the findings related to message quality in eWOM. Detailed, high-quality eWOM is processed via the central route, where consumers engage deeply with the information, leading to higher persuasion and stronger purchase intentions (Cheung et al., 2015). Conversely, low-quality or short reviews may activate the peripheral route, where consumers rely on heuristics, such as the number of reviews or the overall rating, to make decisions (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

The concept of **Social Proof** (Cialdini, 2001) is also reinforced in this review, particularly regarding the influence of platforms like social media and e-commerce sites, where the visibility of other consumers' opinions significantly impacts purchase decisions. Consumers are more likely to be influenced by eWOM when they observe others engaging with it

positively, which aligns with the social proof theory's premise that individuals conform to the behaviour of others in uncertain situations (Hajli et al., 2014).

## 2. Practical Implications

The practical implications of these findings are substantial for marketers and businesses. Firstly, cultivating **source credibility** in eWOM should be a priority. Companies can encourage credible and authentic reviews by fostering strong customer relationships and providing quality customer service. Partnerships with trusted influencers also play a pivotal role in generating persuasive eWOM, particularly on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, where influencer marketing has become a powerful tool (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

Additionally, businesses need to pay close attention to the **quality of eWOM** content. Encouraging customers to leave detailed reviews, which discuss both the positive and negative aspects of a product, can lead to more effective persuasion. Reviews that offer a balanced perspective tend to be more credible and are processed through the central route of information processing, enhancing their influence on purchase intentions (Park & Lee, 2015).

Another practical takeaway is the need to manage **platform-specific strategies** for eWOM. Social media platforms, where engagement is more dynamic and interactive, allow for greater amplification of eWOM messages. Encouraging user-generated content, shares, and interactions with product-related posts can increase the reach and impact of eWOM (Erkan & Evans, 2016). For e-commerce platforms, ensuring that the aggregation of reviews (e.g., average star ratings and the volume of reviews) is prominently displayed can provide valuable heuristic cues that consumers use to make quick decisions (Filieri & McLeay, 2014).

**Valence of eWOM**—whether the content is positive or negative—also has significant practical implications. While positive reviews are generally more beneficial for enhancing purchase intentions, negative eWOM plays a critical role in maintaining the overall credibility of the review ecosystem. Consumers are often sceptical of products with only positive reviews, and a mix of both positive and negative feedback can enhance trust (Rosario et al., 2016). Therefore, businesses should not fear negative eWOM but rather embrace it as an opportunity to demonstrate responsiveness and resolve customer concerns, which can enhance brand perception.

## Conclusion

This systematic review on the effects of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase intention provides valuable insights into the role of source credibility, message quality, and platform characteristics in influencing consumer behaviour. By synthesizing research published from 2014 to 2024, the review highlights the continued relevance of foundational theories such as the Source Credibility Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Social Proof in the context of digital communication. It also emphasizes the importance of fostering authentic, high-quality eWOM in marketing strategies and offers practical recommendations for businesses to enhance consumer engagement.

However, a key limitation of this review is the restriction of data collection to studies indexed in the **Scopus** database. While Scopus is a reputable and comprehensive source for academic literature, it may not encompass the full breadth of research on eWOM, particularly studies published in regional or less widely indexed journals. The reliance on Scopus could also introduce **selection bias**, potentially excluding relevant studies from other databases, such as Web of Science, Google Scholar, or discipline-specific databases like PsycINFO or Business Source Complete. This limitation could affect the generalizability of the findings, as Scopus may disproportionately cover certain geographical regions or types of journals.

Future research would benefit from a broader search strategy that includes multiple databases to capture a more diverse range of studies. Additionally, incorporating grey literature—such as conference proceedings, industry reports, and dissertations—could provide a more comprehensive view of the research landscape. Despite these limitations, the insights derived from this review contribute to a deeper understanding of how eWOM influences consumer purchase intentions, offering both theoretical contributions and practical applications for businesses operating in the digital marketplace.

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