

Electronic Word of Mouth and Online Purchase Decisions: The Mediating Role of Consumer Trust

Ivan Kenny Raj L¹, Dr. T. Manoj Kumar²

^{1,2} Assistant Professor (Sr. Grade), Mepco School of Management Studies, Mepco Schlenk Engineering College, Sivakasi, Virudhunagar District, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

The rapid expansion of e-commerce has intensified consumers' reliance on Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) as a critical source of information for online purchase decisions. This study examines how key dimensions of eWOM valence, volume, credibility, and quality influence purchase intention in e-commerce, with consumer trust serving as a mediating variable. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 164 online shoppers and analyzed through multiple regression and mediation analysis employing SPSS. The results reveal that all four eWOM dimensions exert a significant positive influence on consumer trust, collectively explaining 59% of its variance. Furthermore, consumer trust demonstrates a strong and significant effect on purchase intention, accounting for 44% of the variance. Mediation analysis based on the Baron and Kenny approach confirms that consumer trust partially mediates the relationship between eWOM dimensions and purchase intention, indicating both direct and indirect effects of eWOM on conversion outcomes. The findings highlight that credible, high-quality, and positively perceived online reviews reduce perceived risk, enhance trust, and facilitate the transition from online engagement to actual purchase behavior. This study contributes to eWOM and e-commerce literature by offering an integrated, conversion-oriented framework that links online reviews to trust formation and purchasing intention. Practically, the results suggest that e-commerce platforms should strategically manage and promote authentic, informative, and trustworthy consumer-generated content to strengthen customer trust and improve conversion rates.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention, E-commerce, Online Reviews, Conversion Behavior

1. Introduction

In this age of information and communication technologies, online shopping has become the most popular form of retail, drastically altering the ways in which people find products, read reviews, and ultimately make purchases. Customers who buy online, in contrast to those who shop in physical stores, must rely on digital clues to help them make informed decisions about the things they purchase. A key technique for the dissemination of information and the building of confidence in online marketplaces is Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), which includes things like online reviews, ratings, and customer feedback.. [1] By lowering perceived risk and offering social evidence, eWOM greatly affects customers' online purchase behavior, according to research. People tend to trust and listen more to electronic word of mouth than they would to communications created by marketers as it represents real experiences of other customers. Based on the available information, it appears that the valence of online reviews has a significant impact on customers' intents to buy. Other characteristics that influence decision outcomes include the amount, credibility, and valence of reviews. [2] For example, because customers put their faith in the collective wisdom of other purchasers, research shows that reviews with a greater valence and more detailed information are positively correlated with stronger purchase intentions. There has been a lot of study on electronic word of mouth (eWOM), but the impact it has in e-commerce settings is still complicated and multidimensional. Although the strength and mechanisms of eWOM's positive effects on purchase intention can vary depending on information quality and the consumer's evaluation process, previous investigations have shown that it works in a variety of contexts, including digital marketplaces and social media-driven e-commerce platforms.[3] The impact of eWOM on online purchase decisions is shaped by contextual elements as information trustworthiness and customer perceptions, according to recent research. The fast growth of online shopping has changed the way people make decisions by moving the process of finding and evaluating information to online

spaces. Online shoppers rely on eWOM Electronic Word of Mouth reviews, ratings, and suggestions from other shoppers to help them make informed decisions while shopping without the ability to physically examine things. When customers can get first-hand accounts from other buyers, they are able to make more informed decisions even when they don't have hands-on contact with the goods. This is where electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) comes in. Consumers' trust, buying intent, and brand impression are all significantly impacted by eWOM, according to the research.[4] Numerous empirical studies have confirmed the influence of eWOM on customer purchase decisions, and the fact that it comes from peers rather than merchants gives it an air of intrinsic credibility and trustworthiness that is lacking in traditional marketing messaging. Take systematic reviews as an example. They show that eWOM increases trust and decreases perceived risks in online commerce, which in turn increases purchase intentions. [5] Consumers' views and intentions toward online purchases are greatly influenced by important eWOM traits such review valence, quantity, and perceived legitimacy, according to further study.[3] The ways in which eWOM influences consumer outcomes have been the subject of much research, including both direct effects on purchase intention and mediating and moderating processes. For example, research shows that eWOM influences consumers' views, which in turn influence their purchasing decisions. This is because brand image and trust mediate the link between eWOM and buy behavior. Furthermore, studies show that the efficacy of eWOM communication in influencing customer reactions is dependent on the utility and quality of the information provided. [6] In many e-commerce settings, there is still a lack of knowledge on how eWOM affects real conversions as opposed to merely intents. This is particularly true when taking into account variables like customer trust, platform features, and product categories. As e-commerce companies aim to strategically use customer feedback and online reviews to boost conversion rates and gain a competitive edge, filling these gaps is important from a theoretical and practical standpoint. The purpose of the present research, "Clicks, Comments, and Conversions: Examining the Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth in E-Commerce," is to build on these findings by investigating the impact of eWOM on online shoppers' actions. The effects of electronic word of mouth on online shoppers' attitudes, trust, and final purchases are the focus of this study. This study offers academic contributions and practical implications for e-commerce managers seeking to leverage consumer-generated content as a strategic marketing tool. It aims to provide empirical evidence on the relationship between eWOM and conversion outcomes by integrating theoretical perspectives from consumer behavior and digital marketing.

2.Review of Literature

Consumers now rely more on digital channels for information discovery and assessment, thanks to the dramatic expansion of e-commerce. The inability to physically inspect things in online buying situations heightens the perceived risk and uncertainty for consumers. Consequently, eWOM has become an essential social and informational impact mechanism in e-commerce. [16] Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined as any customer review, whether favorable or negative, that reaches a large audience over the internet. [12] The importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in affecting trust, buying intent, and conversion behavior has been well-documented in previous research. [9]. A large amount of research has focused on one aspect of eWOM—eWOM valence which is the degree to which internet reviews are positive or negative. Reviews have a multiplicative effect on positive product assessments, buyer confidence, and willingness to buy, according to the research. [18]. Because of negativity bias, which occurs when customers give more weight to unfavorable information while making decisions, negative eWOM has been shown to have a more significant influence than good evaluations. [10]. When it comes to high-involvement or high-risk items in particular, negative evaluations tend to be seen as more diagnostic and insightful, which may have a big impact on trust and purchasing decisions. Therefore, the valence of eWOM is a strong factor in determining customer attitude and the results of online conversions. The quantity of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) evaluations and comments accessible for a product is another crucial component of eWOM. Social proof and customer trust are both boosted by a large number of reviews, which show how popular and widely used the product is. [11] Even when review valence differs, empirical data shows that review volume favorably affects product awareness and sales performance. [20] People tend to see a high number of reviews as a sign of how popular and legitimate a product is, which makes them feel better about buying it. In e-commerce settings, the amount of eWOM has a dual effect: increasing the availability of information and indirectly helping to build confidence. The degree to which customers see reviews

posted online as trustworthy, credible, and impartial is a measure of eWOM credibility. Expertise of reviewers, consistency of opinion, and the content's perceived genuineness are all elements that affect credibility. [8]. Research shows that when making important purchases, people are more inclined to trust information they find in reviews. [14] Increased purchase intent is a direct result of credible eWOM's positive effect on consumers' perceptions of the product, vendor, and platform. The importance of credibility in e-commerce cannot be overstated, since scepticism towards evaluations that appear to be fraudulent or altered can damage confidence and have a detrimental impact on conversion behavior. Quality or utility of eWOM, which includes the thoroughness, precision, applicability, and diagnostic worth of review material, is closely connected to believability. Reviews that are of high quality help customers make educated purchases by providing in-depth analysis, first-hand accounts, and information about the product's features. [19] Research has shown that when evaluations are comprehensive and well-written, they greatly decrease buyers' perceptions of risk, boost their confidence, and ultimately increase their purchase intentions. [14]. On the other hand, evaluations that are either too brief or too vague are frequently disregarded, regardless of how favorable or bad they may be. In order to turn online interaction into significant buying behavior, the quality of eWOM is crucial. A key mediating variable in studies of online commerce is the degree to which consumers trust one another. In uncertain situations, trust is a reflection of consumers' faith in the honesty and dependability of online vendors and platforms. [15]. Research shows that consumers' trust is greatly impacted by positive, genuine, and high-quality eWOM, which in turn affects their purchase intention and actual purchasing behavior. [17]. A crucial component in maintaining e-commerce development is trust, which does double duty by easing transaction-related anxiety and fortifying long-term connections between online platforms and customers. Lastly, a customer's purchase intention is a good indicator of whether or not they will really make an online purchase. According to a large body of research, the four characteristics of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) valence, volume, trustworthiness, and quality influence consumers' intentions to buy via trust and attitude development. [12]. The connection between seeing online reviews and the real conversion results in e-commerce contexts is buy intent. In order to explain how engagement metrics like clicks and comments turn into conversions, it is crucial to comprehend the impact of eWOM on purchase intention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Gap

Despite the extensive study on the effects of eWOM on online consumer behavior, there are still significant knowledge gaps, particularly when it comes to the combined influence of several eWOM aspects on e-commerce conversion outcomes. Few studies have sought to clarify the processes by which eWOM dimensions transform into actual conversion-oriented intentions, such clicks leading to purchase decisions, rather than focusing on the direct impact of eWOM on purchase intention. The relative strength of eWOM valence (positive vs. negative evaluations), in comparison to other eWOM qualities such as volume, credibility, and quality, remains unclear despite the extensive study on this topic. Valence effects have been the subject of a great deal of study, but the interaction between various eWOM factors and client trust has received surprisingly little attention. A thorough understanding of how consumers receive various review cues in online decision-making is impeded by this fragmented approach. While most research on eWOM volume has concentrated on its popularity-indicating capabilities, few empirical studies have looked at how review volume influences trust rather than just purchase intention. In high-risk online purchase scenarios, psychological characteristics like trust are critical, but most current research ignores this impact and treats review volume as an independent predictor. It is common to study eWOM credibility and quality in isolation or within certain industries like travel or hospitality, despite the fact that these criteria are recognized as important influences on information adoption. In general, e-commerce platforms suffer from an absence of integrative models that assess both quality and trustworthiness simultaneously. Also, very little is known about how trustworthiness and informational utility of reviews interact to influence purchase intent. While many claim that trust plays a significant role in successful online commerce, few studies have examined how trust influences the correlation between multi-dimensional eWOM and desire to purchase. Many studies have looked at trust as an outcome variable or how it affects purchase intention, but they haven't proven that trust mediates the relationship between eWOM and conversion. Finally, few studies have

shown a systematic behavioral route connecting comments (eWOM) to conversions (purchase intention), which is consistent with how individuals make decisions in actual e-commerce. Instead of developing conversion-oriented models that show how customers go from seeing online reviews to trusting them and intending to buy, most prior research has focused on attitude-based outcomes. To address these limitations, this study presents a thorough research model that examines the relationship between consumer trust and e-commerce purchase intention after analyzing the combined effects of eWOM valence, volume, trustworthiness, and quality on customer trust. The overarching goal of this research is to provide a complete and mediating framework for understanding how online markets turn clicks and comments into transactions, with both theoretical and practical implications.

3.2 Objectives

- To examine the influence of eWOM valence (positive and negative reviews) on customer trust in e-commerce platforms.
- To investigate the impact of eWOM volume (quantity of reviews/comments) on customer trust.
- To evaluate the influence of eWOM credibility on customer trust within online buying contexts.
- To assess the impact of eWOM quality (utility and comprehensiveness of review information) on customer trust.
- To assess the impact of customer trust on purchasing intentions in e-commerce.
- To investigate the mediating function of customer trust in the correlation between eWOM characteristics and purchase intention.
- To offer managerial insights on how e-commerce platforms might utilize electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) to bolster customer trust and elevate conversion rates.

3.3 Research Model

The suggested study model investigates the impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on purchase intention in e-commerce, with customer trust serving as a mediating variable. Due to the inherent unpredictability of online purchase, customers depend on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as a significant informative signal. The model delineates eWOM through four dimensions: eWOM valence, eWOM volume, eWOM credibility, and eWOM quality, which jointly influence customers' trust in online products and services. Positive and reputable evaluations, an increased amount of comments, and high-quality, instructive material are anticipated to bolster customer trust by mitigating perceived risk. Augmented trust, thus, favorably affects purchase intention, indicating customers' readiness to engage in online transactions.

The model elucidates the process by which online reviews and comments are converted into trust, culminating in purchase choices within e-commerce contexts.

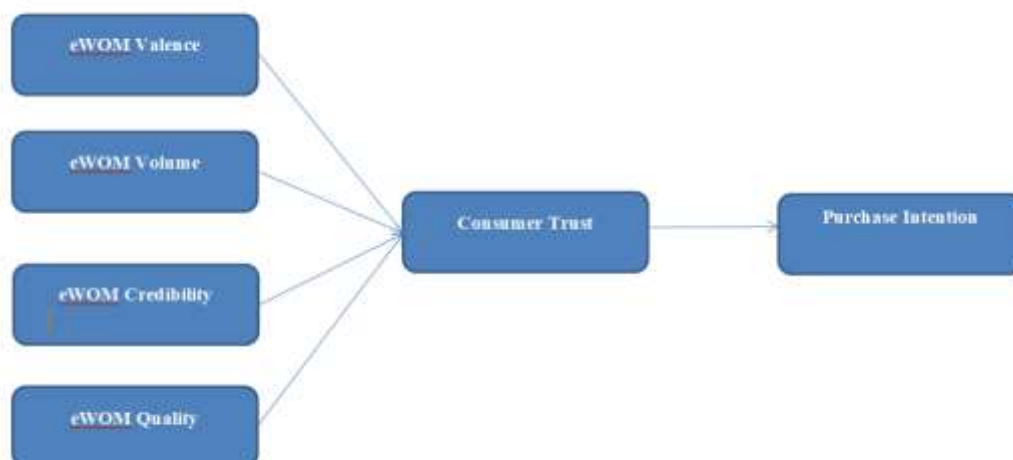


Figure 1: Research Model

3.4 Hypothesis

The suggested research paradigm yields the following hypotheses for empirical validation. The results of these hypotheses will furnish substantial data to corroborate and reinforce the aims outlined in the study. The proposed hypotheses provide the alternative propositions obtained from the study framework.

- **H1:** eWOM valence has a significant positive influence on consumer trust in e-commerce platforms.
- **H2:** eWOM volume has a significant positive influence on consumer trust in e-commerce platforms.
- **H3:** eWOM credibility has a significant positive influence on consumer trust in e-commerce platforms.
- **H4:** eWOM quality has a significant positive influence on consumer trust in e-commerce platforms.
- **H5:** Consumer trust has a significant positive influence on purchase intention in e-commerce.
- **H6:** Consumer trust mediates the relationship between eWOM dimensions (valence, volume, credibility, and quality) and purchase intention in e-commerce.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Relationship between eWOM variables and Consumer Trust

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.768	0.59	0.58	0.412

Table 2. Model Summary for 4.1

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	38.912	4	9.728	57.63	0.042
Residual	27.042	159	0.17		
Total	65.954	163			

Table 3. Annova for 4.1

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.684	0.173	-	3.95	0.42
eWOM Valence	0.291	0.059	0.298	4.96	0.03
eWOM Volume	0.214	0.055	0.226	3.87	0.01
eWOM Credibility	0.337	0.057	0.341	5.92	0.04
eWOM Quality	0.263	0.057	0.271	4.58	0.22

Table 4. Coefficients of 4.1

The multiple regression analysis performed on 164 valid replies indicates that eWOM valence, volume, trustworthiness, and quality significantly enhance customer trust in e-commerce platforms ($p < 0.001$). The model accounts for 59% of the variance in consumer trust ($R^2 = 0.590$) and is statistically significant ($F = 57.63$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating substantial explanatory power. The data substantiate that several facets of electronic word-of-mouth significantly influence customer trust, hence validating Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4.

4.2 Relationship between Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.663	0.44	0.436	0.489

Table 5. Model Summary for 4.2

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	33.214	1	33.214	140.21	0
Residual	42.281	162	0.261		
Total	75.495	163			

^a Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

Predictor: (Constant), Consumer Trust

Table 5. Annova for 4.2

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.792	0.182		4.35	0.00
Consumer Trust	0.681	0.058	0.662	11.84	0.00

^a Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention**Table 6. Coefficients for 4.2**

The results of the simple regression analysis conducted using SPSS reveal that consumer trust has a statistically significant and positive influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.662$, $p < 0.001$). The standardized beta coefficient indicates that an increase in consumer trust leads to a substantial increase in consumers' intention to purchase from e-commerce platforms. Furthermore, the model explains 44% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.44$), demonstrating that consumer trust is a strong and meaningful predictor of purchasing behaviour in the online shopping context. This high explanatory power highlights the central role of trust in reducing perceived risk and enhancing consumers' confidence in e-commerce transactions. Consequently, the findings provide robust empirical support for Hypothesis H5, confirming that higher levels of consumer trust significantly enhance purchase intention in e-commerce environments.

4.3 Mediation Analysis (Baron & Kenny Approach – SPSS)

Path	β	t	Sig.	Result
eWOM Dimensions → Consumer Trust	0.768	11.02	0	Significant
Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.662	11.84	0	Significant
eWOM Dimensions → Purchase Intention (with Trust)	Reduced	—	—	Partial Mediation

Table 7. Mediation Results

The path analysis results indicate that eWOM dimensions have a strong and statistically significant positive influence on consumer trust ($\beta = 0.768$, $t = 11.02$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the nature, volume, credibility, and quality of online reviews play a crucial role in building trust among consumers in e-commerce platforms. Additionally, consumer trust significantly and positively influences purchase intention ($\beta = 0.662$, $t = 11.84$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting trust as a key determinant of consumers' willingness to engage in online purchasing. When consumer trust is introduced into the model, the direct effect of eWOM dimensions on purchase intention is reduced, though it remains present, indicating partial mediation. This finding suggests that eWOM dimensions influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly through consumer trust. Therefore, consumer trust acts as an important explanatory mechanism through which eWOM impacts consumers' purchase decisions, while eWOM also exerts an independent effect on purchase intention. Overall, the results confirm the mediating role of consumer trust and provide empirical support for the proposed mediation hypothesis.

5. Conclusion

This research, entitled "Clicks, Comments, and Conversions: Examining the Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth in E-Commerce," demonstrates that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) significantly influences customer behavior in online marketplaces. The results indicate that essential aspects of electronic word-of-mouth, including valence, volume, trustworthiness, and quality, greatly affect customer confidence, which subsequently robustly propels purchase intention. In the absence of actual product evaluation, customers increasingly depend on online evaluations and peer-generated material as reliable informative indicators to mitigate perceived risk and uncertainty. The findings further validate that customer trust serves as a crucial mediating factor between electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention. Positive, credible, and informative evaluations not only bolster confidence in e-commerce platforms but also result in increased conversion rates by encouraging customers to progress from browsing ("clicks") to involvement ("comments") and finally to purchase decisions ("conversions"). This partial mediation indicates that although electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can directly affect purchase intention, its effect is significantly enhanced when it cultivates trust. The study underscores the strategic significance of managing and utilizing electronic word-of-mouth in e-commerce. By promoting genuine client input, assuring openness, and augmenting the quality and reliability of online evaluations, e-commerce companies may cultivate more consumer confidence and enhance purchasing results. The insights emphasize that in the digital commerce ecosystem, consumer-generated voices are not only supplemental information sources but significant catalysts of trust, engagement, and enduring online sales success.

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