Digital Word of Mouth and Brand Trust

A Review of Literature

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Abstract

The increasing expansion of social media, E-commerce and review websites has transformed how consumers look for and share information related to brands. Complementarily, eWOM
— digital word-of-mouth — is consumer driven discussions regarding products, services, brands and companies that work through digital platforms. In contrast with the conventional word-of-mouth, communications shared via the digital medium can rapidly spread to a large audience and still remain accessible for a longer period This review discusses about some of the existing studies available on digital word-of-mouth, brand trust and consumer behaviour. Precisely , the review pays heavy attention on the online reviews, information authenticity, positive and negative eWOM, purchase intention and buyer behaviour. Previous studies indicate that the quality and usefulness of eWOM can influence consumer information and purchasing decisions , Nonetheless the effect of Ewom may also depend on the quality and characteristics of te information. The Research indicates that consumer trust and buying intentions can be influenced by how a brand reacts to negative reviews. The review highlights that digital word-of-mouth has now been an important factor into the consumer decision-making process and the authenticity of the reviews and also talks about the fake reviews and their impacts.

Keywords: *Digital word-of-mouth, eWOM, brand trust, consumer behaviour, online reviews, purchase intention, social media*

1. Introduction

With the rise of Internet and social media, the relationship between consumers and brands has been disrupted. Customers have ceased depending on ads and details provided straight from other brands. They can now look up product information , reviews, and also work on their own feedback with other buyers

As a result, consumer generated communication has become crucial to the modern marketplace.

A key type of this communication is electronic or digital word-of-mouth (eWOM). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) investigates the way in which online opinion platforms enable consumers to share experiences and opinions about products and services. Digital word-of-mouth can manifest in the form of online reviews, star ratings, conversations on social networks, blogs, forums and any user based content.

One of the main reasons behind that is, consumers tend to rely on information from other consumers when they evaluate unknown products or brands (Giovannoni et al). An advertisement produced by the brand, no matter how good and multi-platform it is, might be perceived differently from a review penned by another consumer. Therefore, studies has investigated whether eWOM impacts trust and purchase intention.

Another insight that plays a vital part in consumer behaviour is brand trust. When consumers start to believe that the brand will fulfill its promises, they are tend to develop positive relationships with brands. This trust is arises from digital word-of-mouth which enables consumers to access information at no cost, on what seems to be what seems to be somebody's experience with a product or a service

Nevertheless, digital word-of-mouth is not always good. Negative feedback raises concerns about a brand, and suspicious or unreliable information which is conveyed online. Thus, the effect of eWOM on brand trust is more complicated than just considering that positive consumer behaviour follows from positive reviews.

Hence this review integrates current behavior research on digital word-of-mouth and brand trust to shed light how relevant digital word of mouth can impact consumer and how different types of brand can influence their decision making process.

2. Objectives of the Review

1. To understand the concept and the importance of digital word of mouth..
2. To examine the relationship between digital word of mouth and brand trust.
3. To analyse how online reviews and multiple other forms of eWOM can influence consumer`s decision making.
4. To examine the role of credibility and positive or negative eWOM in consumer responses.
5. To identify gaps and possible directions for future research.

3. Methodology

This paper follows a literature-review approach. This involved reviewing academic literature on eWOM, online reviews, trust and consumer behaviour. Some studies that were relevant to this review were identified using combinations of search including electronic word-of-mouth, eWOM, brand trust, online reviews, consumer behaviour and and many more for queries shown on literature databases such as Google Scholar.

Peer-reviewed research and review studies that analyzed associations between eWOM and consumer responses are prioritized. The foundational studies of secondary research were also Cited , Enabling us to comprehend the development of eWOM

This review was not intended as a statistical analysis, but rather to identify key themes, findings and research direction in the literature up to date

4. Literature Review

4.1 Concept of Digital Word-of-Mouth

Traditionally, word-of-mouth is when consumers pass information, opinions and experiences regarding products or services to other people. The direct behaviour of word-of-mouth was developed through the Internet, forming electronic word-of-mouth. Consumers can express their thoughts for audiences that are much larger than the people in their immediate peers

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) examined consumer engagement in different online feedback platforms and emphasize how Internet enables consumers to share their experiences and opinions with fellow consumers.

There are three crucial elements where digital Word of Mouth is very different from traditional WOM. Conventional communication takes place between people familiar in real life, while eWOM can happen for someone who has never interacted. Specifically, digital communications can spread to a wide range of people.
eWOM as a new milestone in the evolution of consumer communication; implications (a literature review), Huete-Alcocer, 2017. It tells us how eWOM offers a different experience than convention WOM, especially in the field of information access and dispersion.

4.2 Digital Word-of-Mouth and Consumer Decision-Making

One of the pillars in eWOM study is its effect on customer decisions. Reviews and recommendations help consumers to infer uncertainties in their decisions leading before the purchase of a product.

Ismagilova et al: A meta-analytic review (2020) conducted research on 69 studies and found that consumers' intention to buy was positively related for some characteristics of eWOM. The analysis identified important factors such as argument quality, message validity , usefulness and trust in the message .

This indicates that consumers do not necessarily react the same way to all online comments. The relevance and quality of the information may also influence consumers to pay attention when making a judgment.

Likewise, for their research on Indian e-commerce consumers, Kala and Chaubey (2018) revealed that the quality of eWOM communication positively affects brand image which further adds to purchase intention.

Supported on this basis, eWOM can be conceptualised as an information-search phase of consumer behaviour. Consumers might assess alternatives by comparing their experiences to those of others. before committing to purchase .

4.3 Credibility of Digital Word-of-Mouth

Consumers trust the online information by credibility of data. People may doubt reviews when they feel the reviewer is biased, it lacks coverage or looks like a paid placement.

Ismagilova et al. Similarly, source credibility and trust in the message are both significant predictors of purchase intention across all studies (Bikowska et al. 2020).

Moreover, recent studies have also explored more elaborate categories of eWOM such as multi-media (text, image and video) reviews. Concerning or referring to the sources Roy, Datta, Mukherjee and Paul (2024), with Indian online consumers as subjects their findings suggest that detailed text/image/video reviews can enhance eWOM credibility perception which in turn could influence purchase intention.
Does this mean that the way information is presented may be as important to communication as content?

Consequently, exploring the impact of eWOM on brand trust. If the consumers think that the online message is authentic enough , consumers may become more likely to use it in their interpretation of a brand. If these messages are viewed as unreliable or untrustworthy, the trust may be abolished.

4.4 Positive and Negative Digital Word-of-Mouth

The emotional direction or valence of eWOM is another important area of research. Positive reviews may strengthen favourable perceptions of a brand, while negative reviews may create uncertainty or reduce confidence.

A recent meta-analysis of online reviews across a range of cultural and contextual settings found that review valence had a particularly strong relationship with purchase intention (Qiu & Zhang, 2024). This indicates that whether online information is positive or negative can substantially influence consumer responses.

However, negative eWOM does not necessarily result in permanent damage to brand trust. How the brand responds may also influence consumer perceptions.

Bhandari and Rodgers (2018) examined how brand responses to negative eWOM affected brand trust and purchase intention. Their findings suggest that brand feedback can have both positive and negative effects on purchase intentions, with brand trust mediating the positive effect.

This highlights an important point: digital communication is not necessarily a one-way process. Consumers communicate about brands, but brands can also respond to consumer-generated information.

4.5 Digital Word-of-Mouth and Brand Trust

The relationship between eWOM and brand trust can be understood through the information consumers receive from other users.

When consumers encounter consistent and credible positive information about a brand, they may develop more favourable perceptions of the brand. Repeated negative experiences reported by other consumers may have the opposite effect.
The relationship is not necessarily direct, however it is influenced by factors such as credibility, quality of information , review source and consumer characteristics can influence how eWOM is interpreted.

The growing context of research on eWOM and brands shows that the subject has expanded beyond simple purchase. A review of 279 research articles by Maru and Vijay (2024) found that brand attitude, brand image and brand engagement were among the important areas examined in the literature, while also identifying newly emerging topics such as authenticity, brand identity and brand personality. Likewise, a methodological and thematic review by Singh Bais et al. (2018) concluded that eWOM has a measurable relationship with brand image and purchase intention, although the strength of this relationship varies across different studies and product categories.

This shows that eWOM can influence a large relationships between consumers and brands, not only instant purchasing decisions.

5. Discussion

The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that online word-of-mouth has become an important aspect of consumer behaviour. By relying on the information provided by other users are able to make informed choices , reduce uncertainty and develop opinions about brands.

Three major patterns can be identified.

First , It is important to recognize the significance of credibility.The more information is there on the web , the more likely it is for the consumers to interpret and accept it. The article by Ismagilova et al. (2020) supports the importance of message quality, usefulness and trust.

Second, the direction of the information matters. Positive and negative reviews can lead to different consumer responses. Research on online reviews indicates that review valence can have a substantial effect on purchase intention (Qiu & Zhang, 2024).

Third, brand responses matter. Brands are not simply passive recipients of online conversations. in the digital space. The way they respond to negative eWOM has an impact on trust as well as purchase intentions (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018).

It is visualized through the following model : Digital Word-of-Mouth → Perceived Credibility/Information Quality → Brand Trust → Consumer Behaviour.

However, this relationship should not be considered autonomous . Different people can interpret the same online message differently, and factors such as product category, platform, source and individual features can influence this outcome.

6. Research Gap

Despite considerable research that has been conducted on eWOM and consumer behaviour, the topic still demands further attention.

Firstly, the online world is constantly evolving, and research regarding traditional online reviews may fail to account for new developments, such as short video reviews, social media creator recommendations, and multimedia consumer content.

Secondly, authenticity is a significant concern for consumers; therefore, researchers should further explore the ways in which consumers differ from fake, incentivised, or edited reviews and interpret between genuine and commercial content.

Thirdly, additional research should be conducted to identify the differences between various digital platforms and better understand how a review on an e-commerce website and a recommendation on a social-media platform or any online forum can influence different consumers differently.

Finally, the relationship between various consumer segments and digital content in different cultural and regional contexts could be further explored, as consumer trust and digital engagement may significantly vary depending on a location and a cultural background.

7. Conclusion

Digital word-of-mouth has turned into an essential source of information in interpreting consumer behaviour. Online reviews, ratings, recommendations and social-media discussions enable consumers to share experiences and views about brands on a large scale.

The reviewed researches show that eWOM may shape consumer perceptions, brand related attitudes, trust, and purchase intention . However, the effect of digital word of mouth depends on features such as information quality, credibility, usefulness and positive or negative valence.

Brand trust seems to be an important connection between online information and consumer behaviour. When consumers perceive information as authentic and useful, it can contribute to confidence in a brand. Negative information, on the other hand, may create second thoughts , although brand responses can sometimes help rebuild trust.

Overall, digital word of mouth should be understood not simply as an online marketing tool but as an important part of the consumer environment. Future research should pay greater attention to authenticity, growing digital platforms, media reviews, fake reviews and differences between consumer groups and traditional context .

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