

## Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention: Mediating Role of Brand Trust and Product Involvement

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*Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been recognized as one of the most influential tools of transmitting the information. With the technology-oriented advancements and the emergence of various online social networking sites (SNS) like Face book, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter, the concept of word of mouth has been revived to the electronic word-of-mouth. This spectacle has an enormous influence on the decisions of the consumers they make while purchasing a product or brand. Drawing on the theory of planned behavior, this study examined the influence of electronic word-of-mouth on purchase intention with the explanatory role of the brand trust and product involvement. In this quantitative study the empirical data has been collected through survey questionnaires. For this research the target population was the students of different universities of Lahore who use social networking platforms to read the online reviews and recommendations. Measurement items were adopted from previous studies in marketing literature. To test hypotheses, linear and hierarchal regression techniques have been applied. All the tests on the data to infer results were performed through SPSS version 22.0. The results indicate that product involvement and brand trust positively and partially mediate the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention. This paper endorsed the importance of electronic word-of-mouth, brand trust, product involvement, and this information will assist the marketers in making the efficient and low budgeted marketing strategies in future to boost up the purchase intention of the consumers that will ultimately leads to earn higher profits. The theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.*

## 1. Introduction

Historically, word of mouth has been recognized as one of the most influential resources of information transmission (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). But with the emergence, swift advancement in the field of technology and increasing number of internet users, the emphasis has been revived towards the electronic word-of-mouth. Moreover, a survey was conducted in Malaysia according to which the people aged 15 to 35 are addicted to social media and spends more than 16 hours per week on social networking sites. They are also promulgating their reviews and recommendations with others (Hamid, 2016; Berger et al., 2022). From the recent survey it has found that the total number of the users of social media in Pakistan has been increased by 7 % from April 2019 to January 2020 and this 7% includes approximately 2.4 million users increase in just 9 months (Anjum, 2020). So, in this contemporary era, one of the key areas for research is to study the e-WOM and opinions of the consumers on different social networking sites via internet (Lee, Cheung, Lim, & Sia, 2006; Ginting et al., 2023).

So, all the positive as well as negative statements have the remarkable influence on the perceptions of people that they carry in their minds about a particular product or brand and develop their trust accordingly. Lien et al (2015) stated that the trust is the beliefs the customers are having about the brand product or services and also depicts the level of relationship of the customers with the company. Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Hussain et al. (2021) in the previous studies revealed that the reliability, positivity and integrity associated with the brand results to establish the trust in the brand in a positive way. Moreover Dellarocas (2003) and Shafiqet al. (2023) stated in developing the trust on the brands and companies that the electronic word-of-mouth including the online reviews, recommendations and feed backs on the social networking sites are playing the crucial role. Reviews and recommendations shared by the prior consumers on the social networking sites in the form of e-WOM about the performance, quality, functions and behavior of the brand results in developing the trust of the consumers on the brand (Rice, 2012; Wang et al., 2023). The brands that gain the higher trust level in the market become easily remembered by the consumers and also becomes difficult for consumers to switch to another competitive brand (Chatterjee & Chaudhuri, 2005; Marmat, 2023). The more positive e-WOM shared by the prior consumers on the social networking sites about the brand reduces the perceived risks and enhance the expectations, credibility and reliability associated with the brand, which elevates the trust on the brand and ultimately increase the purchase intention (Kim et al., 2009). One of the types of research was conducted that explored that due to enough use of social media people are more concerned about consulting from the e-WOM and around 2.3 billion on the social networking sites discussed about the brands and the purchase decisions related to the brand (Xia & Bechwati, 2008; Wang et al., 2023). Companies are making the strategies to enhance the purchase intention as it leads to the actual buying behavior of the consumers in the future (Beneke et al., 2016; Rattanaburi, 2023).

Moreover, the online reviews and recommendations intrinsically motivate the consumers in buying the product or a brand. According Zaichkowsky (1985) and Serravalle et al., (2023) product involvement that is the involvement of an individual towards a product category based on the importance and preferences associated with that product further more

product involvement of an individual related to the product depicts the importance of the that product for the individual. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) and Serravalle et al. (2023) portrayed the involvement as one of the important constructs that has the influence on the consumer behavior about the decision making. Positive reviews and recommendation about a brand or a product motivate the consumers to get involved in the specific product category that ultimately enhance the purchasing intention of the consumer.

## **2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development**

Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior, this section presents the existing literature on electronic word-of-mouth, purchase intention, product involvement, brand trust that has helped in development of hypotheses.

### **2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**

According to the TPB, intention of an individual to opt a given behavior is influenced by attitude of that person towards behavior, subjective norm and also perception of behavioral control factors. According to the TPB, intention is comprised of three factors i.e. attitudes, subjective norm and control toward the behavior (Ajzen, 2011). Perception of an individual towards common social pressure is associated with subjective norms. If an individual perceives that others approve/disapprove a certain behavior, individual will be more/less likely to intend to reflect the behavior. An individual's favorable/unfavorable evaluation or assessments of a particular behavior refer the attitudes toward the behavior. TPB suggests that the more positive are attitudes of the individuals toward a certain behavior, the stronger or more is the individual's intention to execute it (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Behavioral control factors are associated with the perceived impact of specific factors to facilitate or prevent a specific behavior. Relatively, Ajzen (2011) explicates that emotions are the outcomes of the beliefs and affect intentions and behavior.

### **2.2 Electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention**

Rapid advancement in the technology has revived traditional word-of-mouth concept to electronic word-of-mouth. Buttle stated that computer-based opinions by the people on the internet through blogs, messages, emails and other online platforms are important to discuss while discussing the e-WOM (Buttle, 1998). Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) e-WOM defined the electronic word-of-mouth as the destructive as well as constructive statements about a product or brand by the prior consumers to measure the popularity of the product among the people, more the positive online reviews available on the internet based on their experiences and preferences on the different online and internet related websites. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2003) realized the importance of the electronic word-of-mouth as an indicator about a product, higher the positive e-WOM about a product or brand more popular the product or brand will be. Godes and Mayzlin (2004) made the research on different variables and concluded that the e-WOM has the positive influence on the decision making of the consumers through internet. Later on, Blackwell stated that the consumer decision making about the purchase is also influenced by the electronic word-of-mouth, this purchase decision making process comprised of five steps includes the demand for a product, searching the

information about it, evaluation of the product based on the characteristic is and finally to select the product in the end (Blackwell & Milliard, 2000). In the previous studies it is revealed that purchase intention is one of the constructs to measure the actual buying behavior of the consumer in the near future (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000).

According to the theory of the social impact it is revealed that the social experience people gain through different social networking sites or online platforms are influential and plays a significant role to influence the purchasing decisions of the consumers (Chen & Shen, 2015). Researcher has studied this theory in the context of e-WOM as an indicator of social experience to have the impact on the PI of the consumers. In the previous research it is stated that the e-WOM is relatively more influential as compared to the t-WOM, that results to have the influence the purchase intention of the consumer towards a brand or product in a significant and positive way, the more the positive electronic word of mouth a product or brand have the more will be the purchase intention of the consumers towards that brand (Tseng et al., 2013). Positive e-WOM about a brand or product results to reduce the probability of the risk associated with that brand for the potential consumers before even buying them and molds their purchasing behavior towards it that ultimately in the future going to be the actual buying action of the consumers and this electronic word-of-mouth can be well communicated through social networking sites that includes the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015). Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

***Hypothesis 1: Electronic word-of-mouth is positively related to purchase intention.***

### **2.3 Brand Trust as a Mediator**

Trust is not simple entity rather different characteristics are associated with it that includes the two parties in this relation the one is the trustor and the other is the trustee, perception of the risk as well as the different level of trust associated with different brands (Wang & Emurian, 2005). Researcher revealed that the online websites and social networking sites are playing an important role to influence the people about the product or brand. These online reviews and recommendation considered being more trust worthy and influential that leads to highly impact the purchase behavior of the consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004.) In the previous study it is stated that the brand trust is one of the factors that enhance the brand commitment, loyalty, value and purchase intention for the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Companies are making the strategies to enhance the purchase intention as it leads to the actual buying behavior of the consumers in the future (Beneke et al., 2016). Chatterjee and Chaudhuri (2005) stated in his study that if the brand trust is high then it will lead to gain the high market share and will be more influential as compared to the brands with low trust level. Consumers can easily develop their trust on the brands through the websites and other online forums by reading the review and recommendations about the brand in the form of electronic word-of-mouth given by the prior consumers. Prior consumers share their reviews about the quality, performance, reliability and integrity of the brand through which the potential consumers get the idea and develop their trust accordingly towards the brand (Dellarocas, 2003). As e-WOM is defined as availability of the encouraging or destructive reviews regarding the brand or product by the people using internet by the potential, existing or previous

customers through social networking sites (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Consumers compare brands with each other based on their prior experiences and preferences associated with the brand and develop their level of trust (Sichtmann, 2007). Online reviews and recommendations about brand product or a service provides enough information that either this brand is going to be favorable or not based on the experiences of others (Sparks & Browning, 2011).

Online feedback with the strong arguments on the social networking sites results to have the strong impact on the others' perceptions (Cheng & Loi, 2014). Negative electronic word-of-mouth about a brand brings more associated risk with it and depicts the lower quality of the brand (Lee & Youn, 2009). According to the Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) the positive electronic word-of-mouth develops the more confidence in consumer that they are going to buy the product that is of the good quality and low risks are associated with it and the major reason to share and read the online reviews and recommendations is to make sure that they are going to purchase the product service of good quality and with low associated risk. Bailey (2004) revealed that the more negative electronic word-of-mouth or complaints about the brand on the social networking sites by the prior consumers leads to negative expectations developed by the potential consumers, lowers the credibility and value of the brand, will enhance the probability of the risk associated with this brand, the brand trust will decrease and negatively impact the purchase intention by decreasing it. On contrary, the more positive e-WOM by the prior consumers on the social networking sites about the brand results to enhance the expectations, credibility and reliability associated with the brand, reduces the risk which ultimately elevates the trust on the brand and ultimately increase the purchase intention (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2009; Sia et al., 2009). These arguments set forth the rationale to formulate the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 2: Brand trust mediates the positive relationship between the electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention.***

#### **2.4 Product Involvement as a mediator**

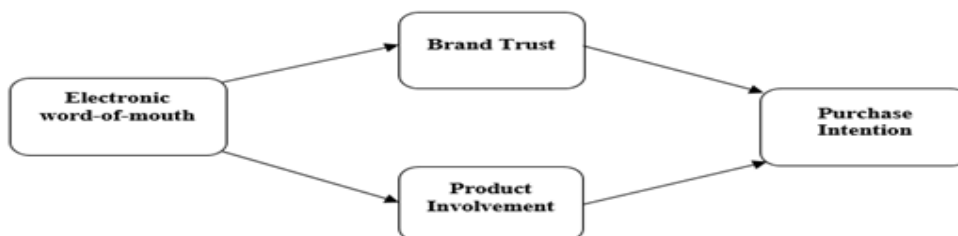
Discipline of psychology is considered to be the root cause of the concept involvement. Involvement is term that can be defined as subconscious or conscious stimulus to an organism about something concerned with the ego central (Sherif & Cantril 1947). Later on, the researcher associated this term involvement with the marketing concepts and studied this construct of the involvement with the other concepts like advertising as well as with the consumer buying activities, brand loyalty, product message, purchase task and retail context (Krugman, 1967). Furthermore, Zaichkowsky (1985) defined the product involvement based on the demands, needs, value and knowledge of the product the perception about the importance of the product category. Product involvement is one of the indicators to determine the emotional and behavioral operations, intensity of willingness, intricacy and profundity of a person towards a product category while making purchase decisions that results to make the product involvement as one of the main constructs to observe while studying the decision-making behavior of the consumers. Product involvement signifies that the product category is more or less concerned or important to the people associated with the people's identity and relationship with that product and other related activities (Traylor, 1981).

Rapid increase and growth in the technology and internet results to facilitate the large number of people to get information about a product, brand or company with the help of internet and as a result of which the concept of e-WOM has been generated (e.g. Xia & Bechwati, 2008). In the previous researches it is stated that the traditional word of mouth is less effective and influential as compared to the electronic-word-mouth, that's why the e-WOM influence the PI of the consumer towards brand or product significantly and positively, the more the positive e-WOM a product or brand have the more will be the purchase intention of the consumers towards that brand (Tseng et al., 2013). As the Purchase intention leads to the actual buying behavior of the consumers based on the unpredictable situations that are unforeseen at the present time (Ramesh, Saha, Goswami, & Dahiya, 2019).

Product involvement that is the involvement of an individual towards a product category based on the importance and preferences associated with that product further more product involvement of an individual related to the product depicts the importance of the that product for the individual (Zaichkowsky, 1985). According to the Dholakia (1998) the product involvement has been studied an intervening variable with others variable in order to observe and study the buying behavior of the consumers. Hence, based on above arguments, following hypothesis is formulated:

**Hypothesis 3:** Product involvement mediates the positive relationship between the electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention.

**Figure No 1: Hypothesized Research Model**



### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Sample and Procedure

Data for this research was collected through primary sources using the Self administrated questionnaire. The students from different Universities of Lahore were targeted. Questionnaires were filled out by the students from University of the Punjab, University of Management Sciences, University of the Education, Forman Christian College University. . According to the Item Response Theory (IRT) the sample size is calculated by multiplying the number of items in the questionnaire with the 10 or 20 according to the requirement. Our questionnaire comprised of 23 items and multiplying it with 20 ( $23 \times 20 = 460$ ). So the sample size for this study is 460 (Ackerman, 1994). 460 questionnaires were distributed among the

students of different universities, out of which 363 filled questionnaires returned back from the respondents and analysis was performed on it.

The respondents comprised of 55.3 % females and 45.4% males. Among them age of 68% were 23-30 years, 19.8% with an age range of 17- 22 years, 9.5% were respondents' range between the age of 29-34 years, and remaining 2,8% were above 34 years. Furthermore, 20.9% was lying under the category of the undergraduate. 37% were graduated, 37.9 % have done with their master's degree and 4.2% were the students of PhD.

### 3.2 Measures

To measure the response from the respondents of all the variables (electronic word-of-mouth, product involvement, brand trust, purchase intention) including in this study were computed on Five-point Likert-type scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

#### 3.2.1 Electronic word-of-mouth

A six items scale has been adopted past study constructed by Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) in order to measure e-WOM variable. The sample item from this scale includes, "I often read other consumers' online product reviews to know what products/brands make good impressions on others" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.827$ ).

#### 3.2.2 Product Involvement.

To measure the product involvement seven-item scale constructed by the Zaichkowsky (1994) has been taken. The scale has been used by different researchers in previous researches. And the one of the sample items from this scale includes, "I think the product is important to me" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.815$ ).

#### 3.2.3 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention was measured using three-item scale developed by Shukla (2010). The sample item of the scale brand image is "I would buy this product/brand rather than any other brands available" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.822$ ).

#### 3.2.4 Brand Trust

Five items scale developed by the Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) was used to measure the brand trust. The sample item of this scale is "I trust the brand" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.825$ ).

## 4. Results

Table No 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Electronic word-of-mouth	3.54	0.9	1			
2. Product Involvement	3.66	1.02	.191**	1		
3. Brand trust	3.45	0.72	.236**	.341**	1	
4. Purchase Intention	3.38	0.85	.141**	.468**	.196**	1

Note. n = 359. \*p < .05 (two-tailed). \*\*p < .01 (two tailed).

#### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and values of correlation among the variables. The correlation values among the variables electronic word-of-mouth, product involvement, brand trust, purchase intention are significant ( $p < .01$ ) and positive which depicts that all the variables are positively correlated with each other and there exists a relationship between them. Whereas, the values of mean for all the variables are more than three i.e. for electronic word-of-mouth ( $M= 3.54$ ,  $SD= 0.9$ ), product involvement ( $M= 3.66$ ,  $SD= 1.02$ ), brand trust ( $M= 3.45$ ,  $SD= 0.72$ ), and for purchase intention ( $M= 3.38$ ,  $SD= 0.85$ ).

#### 4.2 Hypotheses Testing

Table No 2: Regression Analysis

Hypotheses	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	p value	Results
eWOM → PI	0.02	0.170	.007	Accepted
eWOM → BT	0.056	0.265	.000	Accepted
eWOM → PIN	0.037	0.162	.000	Accepted
BT → PI	0.038	0.210	.000	Accepted
PIN → PI	0.219	0.662	.000	Accepted

Note. n = 359. e-WOM = electronic word-of-mouth, BIM = Brand Image, PIN = Product Involvement, BT= Brand Trust, PI= Purchase Intention

Results of the table 2 depicts that the value of  $\beta=0.17$ , with  $p<0.01$  17 % change will occur in PI due to increase of 1 unit in e-WOM,  $R^2 = 0.02$  value depicts e-WOM brings 2% change in the Purchase Intention. Secondly, the value of  $\beta = 0.26$ , with  $p<0.01$  which tells that 1 unit change in e-WOM will bring 26% change in the Brand Trust,  $R^2 = 0.056$  value depicts e-WOM brings 5% change in the Brand Trust.  $\beta$  values of all the relations are positive and significant with p value less than 0.01 depicts that all hypotheses are accepted.

#### 4.6 Mediation Analysis

Three step hierarchal regressions have been done to test the mediation between the two variables. All the demographical variables age, gender, qualification and income level kept constant to control their effect.  $\Delta R^2$  in the model 3 is 0.21 which shows that 21% impact of e-WOM on PI increased by 21% by adding the mediating variable product involvement.

Three steps hierarchal regressions have been done to test the mediation between the two variables. All the demographical variables age, gender, qualification and income level kept constant to control their effect.  $\Delta R^2$  in model 3 is 0.03 which shows that 3% influence of variable e-WOM on PI has increased with value 3% by adding the mediating variable brand trust. Thus hypothesis of brand trust mediation has been accepted.



**Table No 3: Mediation analysis for Product Involvement**

Variables	M1( $\beta$ )	M2( $\beta$ )	M3( $\beta$ )
<b>Controlled variables</b>			
Gender	0.029	0.013	0.011
Age	-0.104	-0.118	-0.073
Qualification	0.145	0.159	0.091
Income level	-0.120*	-0.117*	-0.024
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02		
<b>Independent Variable</b>			
eWOM		0.17**	0.07*
R <sup>2</sup>		0.04	
$\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>		0.02	
<b>Mediating Variable</b>			
PIN			0.63**
R <sup>2</sup>			0.23
$\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>			0.21

Note: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01 eWOM= electronic word of mouth, PI= Purchase intention, PIN= Product involvement

**Table No 4: Mediation analysis for Brand Trust**

Variables	M1( $\beta$ )	M2( $\beta$ )	M3( $\beta$ )
<b>Controlled variables</b>			
Gender	0.029*	0.013	0.006**
Age	-0.104	-0.118	-0.138
Qualification	0.145	0.159	0.176
Income level	-0.120	-0.117	-0.094
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02		
<b>Independent Variable</b>			
eWOM		0.17**	0.13**
R <sup>2</sup>		0.04	
$\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>		0.02	
<b>Mediating Variable</b>			
BT			0.18**
R <sup>2</sup>			0.07
$\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>			0.03

Note: \* represents p<0.05, \*\* represents p<0.01 eWOM = electronic word of mouth, PI= Purchase intention, BT= Brand Trust

## 5. Conclusion

Current study explicates the mediating role of the brand trust and product involvement that contribute to the literature of electronic-word-of-mouth and purchase intention. Furthermore, results and findings suggest that positive electronic word-of-mouth develops the trust of the people on the brand along with increasing their involvement towards a product or brand that will ultimately enhances the purchase intention of the consumers. Specifically, the students that

are more addicted to social media highly rely on the online reviews and recommendation share by the prior consumes while making a decision regarding the purchase of product or a brand.

### 5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Work of the previous researchers about impact of electronic word-of-mouth has been clearly supported through this literature. Findings and results of study contributed toward the electronic word-of-mouth body of literature in enhancing the purchase intention of consumers. Current study also highlights the importance and dependency of purchase intention which is increase under the direct impact of electronic word-of-mouth and indirect impacts i.e., through mediation effect of brand trust and product involvement. In addition to theoretical contribution, there are some important managerial implications of this study includes, positive electronic word-of-mouth is one of the low budgeted techniques to develop the trust of the people on the brand and to capture more customers that will ultimately boost up the sales and profits of the companies. Rowley (2001) stated that only simple advertising is not going to benefit the organization in attracting more customers rather they should work on to make the online communities to spread positive opinions. For all the sectors of the Pakistan, whether it is manufacturing and service sector this study contributes that they should focus on the strategies that evokes the product involvement and brand trust of the people. Current study attests that the positive electronic word-of mouth increases the satisfaction of the customers that they are going to buy the right and quality product.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

Data has been collected from the few universities of the Lahore that has reduced the generalizability of results over the entire population for the future research this research could be done on broader sample of different geographical areas and other cultural contexts to increase the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, only students are considered to be consumers thus selected as a targeted population for this study, but the results can be different or varied by target the people of other segments including the professionals or older age people because they have different aspects and opinions regarding the social media usage as compared to the youngsters. E-WOM has been studied as a holistic variable in this study but for future research the dimensional study could be done by considering the different dimensions of electronic word-of-mouth to infer the more accurate results for this model. This study was cross-sectional and to brace up the association between electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention future research different mediators/moderators can be incorporated by collecting the longitudinal data.

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