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## Investigating the Relationship of eWOM with Consumers' Purchase Intentions: Moderating Role of Website Characteristics

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#### **Abstract**

The rapid advancement in internet technologies has led to a surge in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) phenomena, particularly through online reviews. This study investigates the relationship between review characteristics and consumer purchase intentions, with a specific focus on the moderating role of website characteristics. Data were collected from 240 respondents via a structured questionnaire and analyzed using regression techniques. Results reveal that information characteristics and reviewer characteristics significantly influence purchase intentions. Additionally, website characteristics moderate these relationships, enhancing or diminishing their effects. These findings underscore the importance of managing review and website attributes to influence consumer behavior. Implications for marketers and online retailers are discussed, highlighting strategies to optimize e-WOM and website design to drive purchase intentions.

**Keywords**: eWOM, Review Characteristics, Website Characteristics, Purchase Intentions, Online Retailing.

#### Introduction

Sharp recent growth in internet and communication technologies have made electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) information to be seen more frequently on internet especially in the form of online reviews (Schindler & Bickart, 2005). These reviews provide information from the perspective of a consumer so it is deemed to be more influential on purchase intentions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006) as compared to the information generated by a marketer(Chiou & Cheng, 2003).

Review characteristics may be defined as positive or negative statements given to the products by the consumers in the online shopping malls (Park & Lee, 2009). The overall availability, the number of online reviews, completeness, and range has increased in abundance over the time(Clemons, Gao, & Hitt, 2006). One of the consequence is that customer has become more informed and well updated (Clemons & Gao, 2008).

### Literature review

#### **Review Characteristics**

With the rise of implicit society, review characteristics have become a crucial source of information and a momentous inducer of customer assessment of products (Jamil & Qayyum, 2022; Jamil & Qayyum, 2023). This has consequences in a conversion in the manner in which patron's shop, as characteristics of OCRs facilitate them to formulate more conversant judgment (Moe &Trusov, 2011). 84% of Americans, for example, describe that characteristics of online

reviews manipulate their procure decisions (Lee et al., 2011). Besides, numerous companies are screening more concern in supervising characteristics of OCRs as they could be a nifty foundation of feedback and a priceless means for viewing customers' point of view headed for their products and, hence, are assuming the opposite marketing strategies (Dellarocas et al., 2007). Senecal and Nantel (2004) initiate that consumers who talk to online approval opt for products twice as frequently as those who do not. In addition, characteristics of online reviews are regarded as to be the fresh component in the marketing communication mix (Chen &Xie, 2008) and have turn into a central cause of feedback (Dwyer, 2007). Additionally, organization can use online reviews as a device for indulging customers' stances headed for their products (Dellarocas et al., 2007)

Because of the information unevenness, many users have been facing the condition where they have to make purchase choices based upon both available characteristics of online reviews and their internal opinions (i.e., perception) of a product or an online store (Shih YungChou,2012).

Online review systems, defined as stages that gather, allocate, and sums of feedback and comments about participants' past performance (Resnick et.al, 2000)

One of the type of word of mouse is online consumer feedbacks which includes positive as well as negative responses about the product from different customers in online shopping malls and shops (Jamil and Hasnu, 2013).

In online communities or societies the feedbacks and reviews about the product is important form of word of mouse (Sen and Lerman, 2007). It has come to be very common for the consumers to indication to characteristics of online reviews in order to collect information before a purchase which also formulates purchase intentions amongst the shoppers (Zhu and Zhang, 2010).

Clemons, Gudong, and Lorin (2006) opinion headed for gigantic progress in the amount, fullness, range and the complete accessibility of the characteristics of online reviews and feedbacks that consumers are conscious off. Being up to date knowledge about the product are very necessary for the consumer or user to stay informed about the products that they are interested in (Clemons and Gao, 2008).

Lee, Park, and Han (2011) confirmed that review characteristics had an impression on punter's trust in online shopping malls. Chatterjee (2001) showed that characteristics of online reviews had momentous inspiration on purchase intentions of products and retailers. Park and Lee (2009) scrutinized the waves of qualitative and quantitative feature of characteristics of online reviews on purchase choice and set up that the eminence of online reviews and the amount of online reviews had a positive effect on purchase intentions. Xia and Bechwati (2008) deliberated the effect of the characteristics of online reviews on buyer's purchase intentions with the notion of cognitive personalization and hit upon that online reviews persuade shopper's purchase intentions.

The valence dynamics scent of online reviews and splendor products could have an unswerving impression on sales (Moe and Trusov, 2011). In contrast, the disposition of online tempo of

digital microproducts was set up not to take part in a critical role in purchaser trade decisions (Amblee& Bui, 2012). Online reviews occupy an imperative role in shaping product expansion (Clemons, Gao, and Hitt's, 2006). The degree of online reviews was allied with product sales (Duan, Gu, and Whinston2008). Characteristics of online reviews holding uniqueness-vivid information upshot in mounting the product sales (Forman, Ghose, and Wiesenfeld, 2008). Ogut and OnurTas (2012) set up that elevated client ratings were linked to extra online sales. For the reason that one of the key principal of characteristics of online reviews is to augment shopper's trust, which in rank buttress their purchase decisions (Resnick et. Al, 2000). Another study rivulet that a characteristic of online reviews has paying attention on the shock of online reviews on punter's trust. Customer reviews partially improved shopper's trust in sellers' integrity (Ba and Pavlou, 2002).

#### **Website Characteristics**

Characteristics of website is the basic possession of the way through which information is showing on a leaf of web that make up website Characteristics are defined at a realistically refined and generated in such way that they link to a cognitive style. Maker of the website then choose element s for the web such as (fonts, colors, number of rows in a table, the amount of graphs and pictures) to execute website characteristics (Jamil et al., 2024; Jamil et al., 2019).

A website characteristic is a trait or set of characteristics that shape the "look and feel" of a website. For example, if a page uses more statistics and images instead of words, it said to be "graphics-intensive." A website that exhibits lots of substitute, numerous features of those substitutes, and a great deal of other information is said to present a "large load."(Zhang and Chen, 2013)

Structure of the website (sociability and customizability) of social shopping impression effect the customer's rational and emotional belief and how these belief connection on the other side affect their purpose of the purchase. The results of our study of 563 associates of Mushroom Street stipulate that customizability and cordiality affect consumers' cognitive and emotional trust . And intellectual trust and expressive trust effect consumers' intention to purchase through.(Zhang and Chen, 2013)

In these days every organization uses websites as feature of their marketing and selling activities, and analyst and researcher realize the important of visit to sale on internet (Moe and Fader 2004). Those website perform well who has strong ethical appearance, speed up brand images, and make habitual of click to sale. Needy designs are strange and hard to use, alienate customers, and lose sales.

Website maker step forward to give client maximum information they needed and much more selection they required as compared to porchesand provide maximum visual appeal

If cognitive style of the entire client is homogeneous, then web maker may usestandardized marketing techniques to make the single best website. On the other hand, if customers are heterogeneous in their taste, websites will be modified in different way. As an example self-selected branching, commonrinsing, tradition mining, clustering, and altered stuffing (Ansari and

Mela 2003; Anand, Kearney and Shapcott 2007; Eirinaki and Vazirgiannis 2003, 2007; Im and Hars 2007; Montgomery, Li, Srinivasan, and Liechty 2004; Perkowitz and Etzioni 2000). But highly regarded alteration either focus on product advices, pervasivedata from every customer or activeclients contributions.

Most often discussed website characteristics in the literature are.

- Information design
- ➤ Navigation design
- Visual design
- > Privacy and security
- > Communication and social presence of the website.

#### **Website Information Design**

Design of the information of a website link to the information which are address in the page of the websiteand how these information are presented. Accurate information on the website yield purchase intention (Ranganathan and Ganapathy, 2002). Complete and timely information create loyalty (Mithas et al, 2007). Design of the information yield trust among the customer of the online environment (Cyr, 2008).

#### **Website Navigation Design**

Ease of web browsing attached with navigation design of the website. Although complete information has placed on the website then the user will also leave the site if he found it difficult and tricky to search.(Cyr, 2008). Easy and suitable navigation of the web not only save the time of the searcher but also save finance and reduce risk also and build trust (Harridge-March, 2006). Yoon (2002) has logically showed that navigation of the website design results in trust building.

#### Website Visual Design

Appearance and beauty of the website relates the visual design of the website. It contain the use of sensitive graphics, attractive colors, interesting photographs, combination of different font improve the attraction and smoothness of the site. Karvonen (2000) demonstrated that beauty of the website that appeal to customer's positively affect trust. Cyr (2008) empirically prove that the visual look and design of the website positive affect the trust of user and consumer that have some interest in the products.

#### **Website enabled Communication**

Any customer want to communicate with the trader or seller the dual way communication will be used, and have several options to express their message and communicate with the online store and can give timely feedback to the online store exchange of . Information with e-trader is an antecedent to the purpose of the purchase. Ribbink et al. (2004) argued communication is antecedent to satisfaction and it is the part of e-quality. In same way Mukherjee and Nath (2003) have claimed that suitable communication not only build trust but it also resolve the clashes and doubts.

#### **Website Social Presence**

Presence of website on internet reflect it sociality and how humanefficientinteract with the website, it positively affect the client approaches to the e-business (Gefen and Straub, 2004), different alternative of the communication to the client on web (Finin et al, 2005), easy access and linking to the e-store (Brock, 1998). Other hand Gefen and Straub (2004), Hassnein and Head (2006) shown that social presence of the website has positive effect on the with the website.

#### **Website Privacy**

The aptitude how to control and what kind of information that a person show about him on the website and no one has the right to use such information without that individual is known as privacy on the internet. Privacy of the website link with the user that company is gathering personal and private data, and disagreement of the respondent demand only that how these information will used (Ranganathan and Ganapathy, 2002). Chellapa (2005), Suh and Han (2003) argue that website privacy is also an antecedent to trust.

#### **Website Security**

Three main areas of security are privacy, truthfulness, certification or obtainability; these areas are defined by the Computer Security Institute. Privacy means that data never be retrieved by unapproved parties. Honesty belong that information provided by the user never be interfered by unlawful parties. Certification belong to the copy right of the original owner. Numerous researches likes, Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004), Chellapa (2005), Sultan et al (2002), Chen and Barns (2007) have revealed that advancement in security outcomes in rise in trust with the online retailer.

#### **Information Characteristics**

Normally information characteristics concern with the how accurate the information form and amount of information that a website is offering (Nusair et al, 2008). Very first purpose of website is to grab the attention of interested customer with help of product and services that the website is offering (Smith, 2004). When the website appearance and arrangements is very touchy the interested customer will draw in, but main issue is the contents of the website in online purchase environment. Very touchy design and appearance will only catch the interest at very first stage but without fair valued contents the interested customer may be switch to another website (Shah et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2015).

Occasionally the risk that a customer faces for possible perceived loss or mishap with the product dealing with e-business is rely on the kind of personal information demanded by the website. So, a shopper involves in an e-business deal is fitting to be determined by the level of trust, and the possible damage related with the category of personal information essential. The expected risk is related with the form of the information necessary. Thus, shows that the form of information asked could disturb beliefs regarding risk and thus the keenness or aims of clients to involve in e-transaction dealings (Meinert et. al 2006).

The type of information that is requested by the website varies from website to websites. Some websites ask for contact information in advance before accessing the website and detailed

information regarding the customer may be required in order to complete the deal (Sipior et al. 2004). At the other hand some of the websites make easier for the customer to make a deal with very few amount of private information give to the website, and uses such techniques that are payment assurance, confirmation or authentication of the interested buyer (Hoffman, Novak, & Peralta, 1999). Additional websites may authorize shoppers to look possible services and the products then print out order procedures that could be put forward using other ways of statement (e.g., telephone, mail, or fax) (Miyazaki & Fernandez, 2000).

Initial review of websites tells us that information that a seller required can be categorized as biological, contact or also financial. Contact information refers to buyer's email address, his name, mailing address and also phone numbers. This contact information helps seller from specific website in several ways like making mailing lists to tell customer special time promotion, any innovation in the product, services offered from the web seller. Moreover this contact information would also sell to other parties by the web merchants. Therefore many users and shoppers denied giving their contact information to the websites (Grenier, 2003). Biological information contains of demographic information like interests, hobbies, household income, and personal likeness. Online sellers would use this information to specify their customers for future communications for marketing purpose. Some websites also use this information to market and promote their website to advertisers by giving them detailed information on visitors on their website (Liu et al., 2004). As consumer or user are very concerned about their personal information so they deny to give their information to websites because they don't want to give their information to the third parties so over 90% users deny to provide personal contact information to websites, 40% of users provide false or untrue information due to some ground reasons (Hoffman et al. 1999). Review of literature tell us that how much confidentiality is linked and how biographical data will be used by the website. "a most difficult fence to client dealing in e-transection" (Wang &Emurian, 2005). Information about finance contains such matters as credit card figures and figures of bank account. Though clients are clearly unwilling to afford financial information, this information is frequently observed as essential to complete an ecommerce deal. Still, frequent methods such as buyer's verification, validation and payment guarantee, cryptography, numerical signatures, non-disclaimer, and substitute mode of payment can decrease the apparent risks related with financial dealings (Hoffman, et al. 1999; Kolsker& Payne, 2002; Miyzazki& Fernandez, 2000).

#### **Purchase Intension**

Maoyanet. Al (2014) done research on Social Media Marketing Environment, their paper debates on customer purchase intension on SMM, they analyze main issues of SMM affecting customer purchase intension. By Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) syndicate Customer purchase intension and SMM, creates persuading factors model of SMM based on consumer purchase intention, and it is confirmed rendering to the authentic review (Jamil and Qayyum, 2019, Qayyum et al., 2024). The result of their study concludes that SMM encourage external factor and then put impact on customer inner Perceptions factor, in end it will affect customer's purchase intentions. As a final point, conferring to the features of the customer buying intention grounded on social media marketing bring conclusions and supports

for the growth of the electronic commerce to deliver the orientation for the enterprises (Mazhar et al., 2024).

The paper of Reza and Samie, (2012) found that e-WOM is one of the most successful factors authorizing the brand image and purchase intention of brands in customers marketplace. They demonstrate that consumers intention to purchase a brand increase when they reviews the e-WOM which highlight the main features and drawback. It make for them easy to judge the product.(1)

Illustrating on the Technology Acceptance Model Davis (1989) (8), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) .Fishbein, and Ajzen (1975) (9), and Theory of Planned Behavior (Arzen, 1991) (5), many e-business studies have shown that consumer online purchase intentions are a significant interpreter of consumers' concrete sharing in e-business transactions (10). The relationship between purchase intention and behavior is depend on the notion that human beings stab to make coherent decisions based on the information accessible to them. Therefore, a person's behavioral intention to act upon (or not to act upon) a behavior is the instant agreement of that person's actual behavior .Dependent on the intention—behavior relationship, our comment is that behavioral intention, or more specifically intention to purchase from a certain seller via the Website (Ajzen and Fishbein1980)(3).

it is confirmed according to the real analysis by Maoyan, Zhujunxuan and Sangyang, (2014)(2) in "Consumer Purchase Intention Research Based on Social Media Marketing". The results explain that social media marketing inspire external factors and then weight the consumer's internal perception aspect ,at last, it will concern with customer's purchase intention. According to them E-business depend on social media, customer purchase intention features are the following

- ➤ Purchase Demand Personalization: currently, the users of social media marketing is mainly young and highly educated they follow their own concepts and ideas. The exact need for products and services of the network customers much more unique and modified. They particularly like distinctive products to show their uniqueness and differentiation. The research examination, study of social media marketing permit businessmen to examine the consumer purchase intention under the impact of social media marketing factors hence to deliver customers with the equivalent goods and services. consequently, social media marketing endorse the tailored marketing of E-business for the sake of better satisfaction of the customers
- Purchase Requirement Convenience and Pleasure: customers select social media marketing to purchase goods, because e-commerce can save their time instead of going to shopping mall and check the product, it also save their energy level . on the whole, social media marketing make simple the shopping link, saves time and energy and minimize the difficulties in the shopping process.

Ma'ruf, Mohamad Ramayah (2005) calculate intention to purchase through internet by comparing two models. The first is behavioral model of intention to purchase through the

Internet which was studied as a source of attitude towards the purchase, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use. The second is Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), skewed norm, and supposed risk .Results indicate that both models considerably prejudiced behavioral intention to purchase. (7).

Customers shops via the Internet are gradually increasing. In USA over 90% customers shops through internet (http://www.bsa.org/usa/press/newsreleases, accessed on 2 July 2003), and in Singapore their percentage is above 25% (Phau& Poon, 2000)(6)

From the literature we draw following hypothesis for the study

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between information characteristics and purchase intention.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between reviewer characteristics and purchase intention.

H<sub>3</sub>: Website characteristics moderate the relationship between information characteristics and purchase intention.

H4: Website characteristics moderate the relationship between reviewer characteristics and purchase intention.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for the study. Model shows that information characteristics (IC), reviewer characteristics (RC) predict the consumers' purchase intention (PI) in an online setting. Figure also depicts the moderating role of website characteristics (WC)

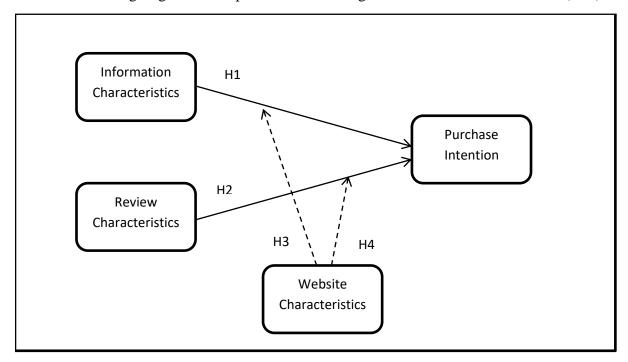


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

#### Methodology

#### **Data and Instrument**

Data used in the study were collected using structured questionnaire. Questionnaire was developed from the review of existing literature. Questionnaire was based on 5 point Likert scale with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. A total of 17 items were used to measure underlying constructs. 05 items measured information characteristics (IC), 05 for review characteristics (RC), 04 for website characteristics (WC) and 03 to measure purchase intention (PI).

Questionnaire was uploaded on Google docs and the participants were invited to provide responses. A total of 240 valid responses were collected.

#### **Analysis and Results**

For the analysis of data collected, IBM SPSS 21 was used. The demographic analysis of data shows that out of 240 respondents, more than 52 per cent respondents were male.

Gender	Percentage		
Male	52.8		
Female	47.2		
Education level			
Undergraduate	67.7		
Graduate	32.3		
Age			
18 or below	37		
19-25	46		
25-35	11		
36 or above	6		
Annual income			
Under Rs100,000	41		
Rs100,000-Rs499,000	25		
Rs500,000-R1,000,000	15		
Above Rs1,000,000	19		
Daily internet usage			
1-5 hours	25.8		
6-10 hours	31.2		

11-20 hours	16.1
21 hours or more	25.8

Ordinary least squares (OLS) technique was used to test the hypothesis set forth. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics while table 3 presents the regression analysis results.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics							
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N				
Purchase Intention	3.6344	.66588	240				
Information Characteristics	3.5032	.59235	240				
Reviewer Characteristics	3.3032	.65094	240				
Website Characteristics	3.8952	.62396	240				

#### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		В	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.003E-013	.081		.000	1.000
	Zscore: IC	.297	.097	.297	3.061	.003
	Zscore: RC	.292	.098	.292	2.982	.003
	Zscore: WC	137	.091	137	-1.498	.137
2	(Constant)	.099	.079		1.257	.211
	Zscore: IC	.233	.092	.233	2.520	.013
	Zscore: RC	.195	.100	.195	1.955	.053
	Zscore: WC	421	.107	421	-3.939	.000
	ICxWC	569	.136	885	-4.195	.000
	RCxWC	.297	.134	.434	2.223	.028

a. Dependent Variable: Zscore: PI

Descriptive statistics revealed that participants had a mean purchase intention score of 3.63 ( $\pm 0.67$ ). The results of hypothesis testing are summarized below:

To test the hypotheses, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was applied to the collected data.

H1: Information characteristics positively influence purchase intention ( $\beta$  = 0.297, p < 0.05). This finding aligns with prior studies, indicating that well-organized and accurate information fosters consumer trust and intention to buy. H2: Reviewer characteristics positively influence purchase intention ( $\beta$  = 0.292, p < 0.05). This supports the notion that credible and detailed reviews enhance consumer confidence. H3 and H4: Website characteristics significantly moderate the relationships between information characteristics ( $\beta$  = -0.421, p < 0.01) and reviewer characteristics ( $\beta$  = 0.297, p < 0.05) with purchase intentions. High-quality website design amplified the positive effects of reviews, while poor design diminished them.

#### **Discussion**

This study highlights the pivotal role of e-WOM in shaping consumer behavior. The findings confirm that information and reviewer characteristics are integral to fostering purchase intentions. Moreover, website characteristics serve as a critical moderating factor. For instance, aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly websites can enhance the persuasiveness of reviews, while poorly designed websites may undermine these effects.

The interplay between review characteristics and website attributes suggests that online retailers must adopt a holistic approach. Not only should they encourage detailed and credible reviews, but they should also invest in website features such as navigation ease, visual appeal, and privacy safeguards to build consumer trust. These findings align with theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), emphasizing the importance of perceived ease and usefulness.

#### Conclusion

The study concludes that managing both review and website characteristics is essential for influencing consumer purchase intentions in the online retail environment. Businesses should prioritize creating informative, credible reviews and optimizing website design to maximize their impact. Future research could explore additional moderators, such as cultural differences or product categories, to expand the generalizability of these findings.

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