



## INVESTIGATING THE DYNAMICS OF ONLINE REVIEWS, ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT TO E-TAILERS

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### ABSTRACT

In the era of digitalization, Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a pivotal factor influencing consumer behavior, particularly in the context of online purchases. This study investigates the dynamics of eWOM and its impact on consumer purchase intentions within the Indian e-tailing market. Drawing upon insights from prior research, this study explores the multifaceted nature of eWOM by considering parameters such as review consistency, quality, credibility, expertise, platform reliability, product quality, and review complexity. These parameters are incorporated into a comprehensive scale adapted from established measures utilized in previous studies. Additionally, customer purchase intentions are evaluated using a scale adapted. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by shedding light on the intricate relationship between eWOM and consumer purchase intentions in the Indian e-tailing context. The path coefficient between the construct, e-WOM, and purchase intention (PURINT) is 0.845, indicating a strong positive relationship where higher values of e-WOM are associated with increased purchase intention; this relationship has a significant standardized effect size (beta = 0.845, R-square = 0.714, f-square = 2.491). The findings also suggest that dimensions such as platform reliability, product complexity, product quality, review consistency, and review credibility significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions, while reviewer expertise and review quality show negligible impacts.

**Keywords-** eWOM, e-tailing, Purchase Intension, Online Reviews

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), the digital dissemination of information, views, and experiences about products and services, plays a pivotal role in modern online consumer behavior, markedly influencing consumers' purchase intentions. The rise of social media and various online platforms has amplified the importance of online reviews and eWOM in guiding consumer purchase decisions. The digital era has witnessed an increasing interest in understanding the impact of online reviews and eWOM on consumer purchase intentions, with notable studies by scholars such as Li and Liang (2011) asserting that eWOM has a vital influence on buying decisions, branding it as a crucial information source for online shoppers.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) support this view, indicating that online reviews and ratings significantly influence consumer purchasing, especially among those with limited product knowledge. The influence of eWOM extends significantly when it comes from credible sources, a notion supported by Liu and Park (2015), who highlight the importance of source credibility in affecting consumer purchase intention. This trust in eWOM is markedly higher when originating from known contacts, such as friends, family, and experts, as opposed to anonymous entities.

Moreover, Cheung and Lee (2012) explore the influence of eWOM quantity and quality on

buying intentions, suggesting that consumers are swayed more by a large volume of positive eWOM compared to a smaller amount of negative feedback. The type of product also plays a role in eWOM's effectiveness, with Zhang et al. (2014) noting a greater impact on purchase intentions for experiential goods (e.g., travel, food, entertainment) over search goods (e.g., electronics), due to their subjective nature and reliance on external opinions for purchase decisions.

Park and Lee (2009) add that consumer engagement with a product or service category increases the susceptibility to eWOM influence. Additionally, individuals with a high need for cognition, who process information more thoroughly, are more inclined to be influenced by eWOM, underscoring the multifaceted nature of eWOM's impact, as it is shaped by source credibility, message quantity and quality, product/service type, and consumer characteristics.

Marketers are thus advised to strategically manage and utilize eWOM to steer consumers' purchase decisions positively. Encouraging customers to post positive reviews, swiftly addressing negative feedback, and engaging with consumers on social media are crucial strategies for enhancing eWOM's credibility and effectiveness. In the current digital landscape, where online platforms are integral to consumer decision making, eWOM serves as a key informational resource, aiding consumers in making informed purchase decisions by shaping perceptions and attitudes towards brands.

Vermeulen and Seegers (2009), Bickart and Schindler (2001), and Wang and Zhang (2012) all acknowledge eWOM's significant impact on consumer purchase intentions, highlighting its superiority over traditional marketing communications in influencing consumer behaviour. As suggested by Cheung and Thadani (2012), the effectiveness of eWOM is notably higher when it originates from close acquaintances rather than strangers, and experts' opinions are deemed more credible than those of non-experts. Kim et al. (2015) further differentiate the impact of eWOM based on product type, finding a stronger influence on hedonic products like fashion items and luxury goods, compared to

utilitarian products, due to the reliance on others' opinions for subjective assessments. Lastly, consumer traits, such as a desire for uniqueness (Chen and Xie, 2008), also modulate the effect of eWOM on purchase intentions, illustrating the complex dynamics at play in the digital consumer marketplace.

This research delves into how electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) influences the purchasing intentions of customers in the Indian e-tailing market. E-tailing, commonly known as electronic retailing, refers to business-to-consumer transactions conducted virtually or over the Internet. Simply put, e-tailing is the practice of shopping online. Platforms like Amazon, Snapdeal, and Flipkart are prominent examples of e-tailing where a variety of products with diverse features are offered for sale.

Online consumer reviews serve as a prevalent form of eWOM. They are the digital equivalent of traditional word-of-mouth recommendations and hold significant sway over consumers' purchasing decisions in the digital realm. Prior studies have demonstrated a growing reliance on eWOM among online consumers compared to conventional marketing tools. To assess eWOM in this study, a scale was developed incorporating parameters such as review consistency, quality, credibility, expertise, platform reliability, product quality, and review complexity. The items measuring e-WOM were adapted from scales utilized by Lee et al. (2007), Fillieri (2015), and Baharuddin & Yaacob (2020) respectively. Similarly, the items evaluating customer purchase intentions were adapted from the scale employed by Sulthana and Vasantha (2019).

With the advancement of digital marketing, traditional (WOM) has evolved into (e-WOM), enabling consumers to share their views and experiences with a vast audience almost instantaneously (Brown et al., 2007). This shift has sparked significant interest among researchers, leading to a substantial volume of studies exploring the impact of e-WOM on consumers' buying intentions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; King et al., 2014). While the effects of e-WOM on social media have been extensively studied, there has been limited focus on how dimensions of online reviews influence purchase intentions in the e-tailing industry, especially post-COVID. With the

emergence of Web 2.0, user-generated online reviews on e-commerce platforms have become highly influential in shaping purchasing decisions. According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, positive online opinions, along with collective ratings, significantly impact purchase intentions (Mo et al., 2015). Social media has also become a crucial platform for sharing online reviews, affecting consumer buying behavior. The market size of the online retail industry in India reached 103 billion U.S. dollars in 2023 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 15 percent until 2027, despite recent economic challenges caused by COVID-19. India's annual transacting e-retail shopper base is projected to reach 230–250 million people in 2023, with over 100 million shoppers added in the past three years. This study aims to determine the effect of e-WOM, measured through review consistency, quality, credibility, expertise, platform reliability, product quality, and review complexity, on purchase intentions in the e-tailing industry of India. The following section presents a review of related literature that supports the hypotheses, followed by the research design of the study. The data analysis section discusses a PLS-SEM based model, and the subsequent sections detail the major findings, contributions, and implications of the study.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES**

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) encompasses any digital platform-shared review concerning a product or service (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Rodrigo Magalhaes & Basim Musallam (2014) endeavored to unveil the motivational factors driving eWOM engagement and highlighted the cross-cultural implications of these factors. Among various forms of e-WOM, online consumer reviews reign as the most prevalent and favored. These reviews entail customer-generated insights and recommendations posted online regarding products, services, or brands, typically comprising experiences, evaluations, and opinions (Senecal and Nantel, 2004). The persuasiveness and logic of online reviews significantly influence consumers' attitudes towards them. Attitude, as per Kotler (2000), denotes an individual's expression of personal evolution, action tendency, and emotional disposition towards objects or ideas. Such action tendencies can be reinforced, weakened, or substituted by new ones

(Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). In this context, e-WOM pertains to the emotional sentiments evoked by online reviews (Lee et al., 2007). Recognizing the potency of reviews, many companies are establishing their review platforms to foster e-WOM communication (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008; McWilliam, 2000; Filieri, 2015). These platforms often provide e-WOM rank values to aid consumers in assessing product quality. Unlike star ratings, these rankings indicate brands with more positive reviews. Evidence suggests that consumers utilize e-WOM, via online reviews, to gather product information and facilitate comparisons with similar products (Filieri, 2015). This study assessed eWOM using criteria including review consistency, quality, credibility, reviewer expertise, platform reliability, product quality, and review complexity.

#### ***Review consistency***

Review consistency refers to the degree of similarity or agreement between different reviews of the same product. When consumers read consistent reviews, it increases their confidence in the product and influences their purchase intention positively (Kim & Kim, 2020). Adjei et al. (2010) opined that customers search more for complex products because of greater perceived risk. The purchase of complex products requires more information online or offline for making a final purchase decision. Positive and negative online reviews impact consumers' behavior, the intensity of the impact depends on the type of product and service. Purnawirawan et. al, (2015) suggest that unfavorable reviews have more impact on attitude formation than favorable reviews, which suggests that negative reviews carry more weight than positive ones. Many studies have been conducted on online reviews considering the young generation. However, in contrast, more academic work needs to be conducted on how older adults react to online reviews, ratings, and recommendations and whether it impacts their purchase behaviors. This is an area that can be explored further in future studies. The literature focuses on some of the keywords like electronic word of mouth, source expertise, trust, credibility, valence, and online reviews, ratings, and recommendations. Therefore, the first hypothesis can be formulated as follows-

*H1: Review consistency positively influences purchase intention.*

#### **Review quality**

Review quality refers to the review's degree of detail and usefulness in providing information about the product. High-quality reviews provide more information and positively influence consumers' purchase intentions (Fang & Ye, 2019). It refers to "the degree of similarity between individuals on certain attributes" (Wangenheim and Bayón, 2004, p 44). It is "the similarities between two people's likes, dislikes, and values" (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008, p 23). The study also highlighted the role of e-WOM in affecting consumer buying behavior towards a particular product or service. Chu and Kim (2015) describe the social relationship factors transmitted via online social websites as e-WOM. The conceptual model given in the study focussed on variables like tie strength, homophily, trust, and interpersonal influence as essential antecedents to e-WOM behavior. It is concluded that tie strength, trust, and interpersonal influence are significantly associated with the eWOM; on the other hand, a negative relationship was found concerning homophily. Therefore, the second hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

*H2: Review quality positively influences purchase intention.*

#### **Review Credibility**

Review Credibility refers to the degree to which consumers perceive reviews as trustworthy and reliable. Reviews from credible sources, such as reputable websites or well-known reviewers, positively influence consumers' purchase intention (Hussain et al., 2019). Credibility is a determinant of the information source (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Menkveld, 2013). In the services context, electronic word of mouth challenges source credibility (Ayeh et al., 2013; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Traditional word of mouth does not provide accurate information because it is not obtained from strong-tie groups such as family or friends (Cheung & Thadani, 2010). The consumer can interact with any consumer worldwide concerning a product or service-related information service providers give (Litvin et al., 2008). Source credibility uses source expertise and source trustworthiness, as critical components which is supported by studies such as by Wangenheim & Bayón,

2004; Shabsogh et al., 2012; Akyüz, 2013; Wu, 2013; López & Sicilia, 2014". Therefore, the third hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

*H3: Review Credibility positively influences purchase intention.*

#### **Reviewer Expertise**

Reviews from expert reviewers or users who have used the product multiple times positively influence consumers' purchase intention (Singh & Singh, 2019). Ruitkamp (2013), in his study, refers to source expertise as the perceived ability of the source to make valid assertions about a product or service. Wangenheim & Bayón (2004) defined expertise as the ability to perform product-related tasks. Sparks and Browning (2011) and Wu (2013) conducted their study on the services sector. This review suggests that source expertise has a positive impact on customers' attitudes toward a product or service. Thus, the fourth hypothesis was formulated as follows:

*H4: Reviewer expertise positively influences purchase intention.*

#### **Platform Reliability**

Platform reliability refers to the degree to which consumers observe the platform as trustworthy and reliable. Platforms with a good reputation and positive user feedback positively influence consumers' purchase intention (Chen & Xie, 2017). The information integration theory proposes that when a consumer is exposed to several online opinions, then the consumer analyzes all the opinions to evaluate his/her decisions. In the process, the customer participates in all the online opinions. This incorporation is called the perceived valence of electronic word of mouth (López & Sicilia, 2014; Anderson, 2014) stresses the information integration by the consumers as per the credibility and reliability of the information sought. Studies such as by López & Sicilia, (2014) suggested that positive e-WOM is far more common than negative e-WOM. Tsao, Lin, et al. 2015; and Duan et al. 2008) used two determinants: review valence, and review quantity, to analyze how their interaction affects the consumers, designated as conformist and non-conformist based on the valence of the interaction. The study concluded that positive reviews enhance purchase intentions, and the reviews increase the influence of review valence on consumers'

purchase decisions. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

**H5:** *Platform reliability significantly influences the consumer purchase intention.*

**Product Quality, and Review Complexity**

Online Review Complexity refers to the level of intricacy or sophistication present in consumer reviews posted on digital platforms. It encompasses the depth of analysis, detailed descriptions, and nuanced evaluations provided by reviewers regarding products or services. This aspect of online reviews considers the extent to which reviewers delve into various aspects of the product or service, including its features, functionality, performance, and potential drawbacks, among others. Lee et al. (2007) suggested that review complexity can influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards eWOM, highlighting its significance in understanding the dynamics of online consumer behavior.

In the context of eWOM, product quality serves as a crucial dimension influencing consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions, and decision-making processes. Positive reviews highlighting high product quality can enhance consumer trust and confidence, potentially leading to increased purchase likelihood and brand loyalty. Senecal and Nantel (2004) emphasized the significance of product quality in online consumer reviews, indicating its impact on shaping consumers' perceptions and behaviors in the digital marketplace. Therefore, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

**H6:** *Product Quality significantly influences the consumer purchase intention.*

**H7:** *Review Complexity significantly influences the consumer purchase intention.*

**H8:** *eWOM significantly influences the consumer purchase intention with respect to E-tailers.*

**Synthesis of previous researches:**

Study	Contribution	Gaps
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)	Defined e-WOM as any review concerning a product or service shared on digital platforms.	Did not explore specific dimensions of online reviews that influence purchase intentions.
Senecal and Nantel (2004)	Discussed the influence of online consumer reviews on purchasing decisions.	Did not analyze the impact of different review dimensions like consistency, quality, and credibility.
Lee et al. (2007)	Suggested that review complexity can affect consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards e-WOM.	Insufficient analysis on the specific impacts of review complexity on different consumer purchase intentions.
Park & Lee (2008)	Identified the significant impact of e-WOM on consumer behavioral intentions based on review quantity and type.	More recent studies needed to address changes in e-WOM dynamics post-COVID.
Adjei et al. (2010)	Analyzed consumer behavior regarding complex products and the role of online reviews.	Focused on general consumer behavior without distinguishing between different age groups and their reactions.
Rodrigo Magalhaes & Basim Musallam (2014)	Investigated motivational factors driving e-WOM engagement and highlighted cross-cultural implications.	Lacked focus on how these factors specifically impact purchase intentions in the e-tailing industry.
Javier & Correa (2014)	Explored the influence of e-WOM on different product types and the role of gender.	Did not address the post-COVID shift in consumer behavior and online review dynamics.
Thoumrungroje (2014)	Examined the impulsive consumption driven by social media and reliance on e-WOM.	Need for further study on the long-term effects of e-WOM on sustained purchase behavior.
Torlak et al. (2014)	Investigated e-WOM's impact on purchase intentions through brand image for cell phone brands.	Focused on cell phones; broader analysis across different product categories and platforms needed.

Study	Contribution	Gaps
Purnawirawan et al. (2015)	Found that negative reviews have more impact on attitude formation than positive reviews.	Did not address the impact of review consistency on older adults' purchasing behaviors.
Chu and Kim (2015)	Explored social relationship factors like tie strength and trust in e-WOM behavior.	Did not include detailed dimensions of online reviews such as quality and credibility in their model.
Alhidari et al. (2015)	Identified self-reliance, involvement, and risk-taking as critical antecedents of e-WOM on social networks.	More research needed on how these antecedents interact with other review factors like quality and credibility.
Ladhari & Michaud (2015)	Analyzed the impact of e-WOM on Facebook on hotel booking intentions and user attitudes.	Limited to the hotel industry; requires extension to other e-tailing sectors.
Wang et al. (2015)	Found positive reviews impact customer attitudes more than neutral or negative ones.	Did not explore the role of detailed review complexity and product type in shaping purchase intentions.
Yan et al. (2016)	Studied the adoption of e-WOM on e-commerce websites and social media based on cognitive cost theory.	Did not analyze the combined impact of e-WOM credibility and usefulness on purchase intentions.
Erkan & Evans (2016)	Compared the effectiveness of e-WOM on shopping websites versus social media for online purchase intentions.	Did not explore detailed review dimensions like quality and complexity affecting purchase decisions.
Sa'ait et al. (2016)	Analyzed the impact of e-WOM elements like accuracy, relevance, and timeliness on purchase intentions.	Needs extension to include newer e-WOM elements and post-COVID consumer behavior shifts.
Chen & Xie (2017)	Examined platform reliability and its influence on consumer trust and purchase intentions.	Limited focus on the interplay between platform reliability and other factors like review complexity and quality.
Saleem & Ellahi (2017)	Investigated the effect of e-WOM on purchase intentions for fashion products on Facebook.	Focused on a single platform and product category; broader cross-platform and cross-category analysis needed.
Kudeshia & Kumar (2017)	Examined the impact of social e-WOM on brand attitude and purchase intentions on Facebook.	Limited to Facebook; requires exploration of other social media platforms and their comparative effectiveness.
Gvili & Levy (2018)	Highlighted the importance of credibility and social capital in consumer engagement with e-WOM on social media.	Did not focus on the specific impact of these factors on purchase intentions in the e-tailing industry.
Farzin & Fattahi (2018)	Highlighted factors like sense of belonging and consumer trust in e-WOM affecting brand image and purchase intentions.	More focus needed on how these factors interact with review dimensions like quality and complexity.
Fang & Ye (2019)	Highlighted the positive influence of high-quality reviews on purchase intentions.	Lack of comprehensive analysis on how review quality varies across different platforms and product categories.
Hussain et al. (2019)	Investigated the impact of review credibility on consumers' purchase intentions.	Did not consider the combined effects of credibility and other review dimensions like expertise

Study	Contribution	Gaps
		and platform reliability.
Singh & Singh (2019)	Found that expert reviewers positively influence consumer purchase intentions.	Need for more research on how varying levels of reviewer expertise impact different consumer segments.
Ananda et al. (2019)	Examined advocacy and validating behaviors leading to eWOM engagement among Indonesian luxury consumers.	Context-specific to Indonesia; lacks a comprehensive analysis across diverse demographics and regions.
Kim & Kim (2020)	Examined the effect of review consistency on consumer confidence and purchase intentions.	Limited research on the influence of review consistency across different product types and consumer demographics.
MajlesiRad & Shoushtari (2020)	Analyzed the impact of e-WOM marketing on luxury brands through social networking sites.	Limited to luxury brands; need for broader analysis across different product categories post-COVID.
Mehyar et al. (2020)	Identified the positive impact of e-WOM quality and quantity on purchase intentions.	Contradicted by findings on e-WOM credibility; requires further exploration of this discrepancy.
Ismagilova et al. (2020)	Conducted a meta-analysis to identify key factors of e-WOM affecting buying intentions.	Generalized findings; more specific analysis on e-tailing industry needed post-COVID.
Harun et al. (2020)	Found that positive e-WOM messages impact purchase intentions more than negative ones, with trust as a moderator.	Limited to positive vs. negative dichotomy; more nuanced analysis of review dimensions required.
Ahmad et al. (2020)	Examined the mediating role of online trust in e-WOM and airline e-ticket purchase intentions.	Limited to the airline industry; broader application to other e-tailing sectors required.
Zhou et al. (2021)	Explored how perceived quality, social value, personal value, and functional value lead to eWOM among Chinese consumers.	Focused on Chinese consumers; need for similar studies in different cultural contexts, such as Mexico.
Vogue (2022)	Highlighted the popularity and importance of haute-couture luxury brands among Mexican consumers.	Did not analyze the specific role of eWOM in influencing consumer behavior in Mexico.
Yu and Hu (2020); Dolega et al. (2021); Khan (2022)	Discussed various strategies luxury marketers can leverage on social media.	Limited focus on eWOM specifically; need to investigate its unique impact and mechanisms in the luxury sector.
Holmqvist et al. (2020); Pangarkar et al. (2022)	Emphasized the increased importance of digital marketing and social media engagement post-COVID for luxury firms.	General emphasis; requires targeted research on the interplay of eWOM and digital marketing in the luxury sector.

Source: Author's Own

## Methodology

### Research Design

This research drew upon data gathered through an online survey distributed via various social media platforms. Spanning from April to June 2023, a total of 459 comprehensive responses were collected.

According to Ho and Dempsey (2010), young adults are the most active demographic online, with 87% of respondents belonging to Generation Z. They frequently utilize social media platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho, and Myntra for product exploration and online shopping. The majority of

respondents of the current study, falling within the 18 to 24 age range, represent the target audience, offering valuable insights into electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and purchasing behaviors. Gender distribution was fairly even, with 198 participants (43.1%) identifying as female.

Measurement items for e-WOM were adapted from scales by Lee et al. (2007), Fillieri (2015), and Baharuddin & Yaacob (2020), while items evaluating customer purchase intentions were adapted from Sulthana and Vasantha (2019). These items were initially translated into Hindi with minor adjustments, and a pilot-tested questionnaire was administered before finalizing the survey instrument. Respondents rated all items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree.

Construct uni-dimensionality was assessed, confirming that all scales measuring a particular construct loaded onto one factor. To examine the impact, a second-order construct for eWOM was created by combining all selected independent variables. Factors for the study were identified using exploratory factor analysis with SPSS 20. A rotated component matrix revealed seven latent variables derived from the questions administered in the pilot study. Two specific tests were conducted for the preliminary screening and processing of indicators: a reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha and an exploratory factor analysis using PCA and the Varimax method (Watkins, 2018; Suhr, 2006). The collected data underwent analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via PLS-4.0.1 software (Hair et al., 2017; Haenlein and Kaplan, 2004). This approach was employed to investigate the relationships between the variables measured above and the latent construct of eWOM. For the purpose of scale development, researchers meticulously adhered to a series of rigorous steps, including construct definition and content domain delineation, term generation and expert review, scale purification and item refinement, with the final step culminating in scale development, as outlined in the comprehensive study conducted by Papadas et al. (2017).

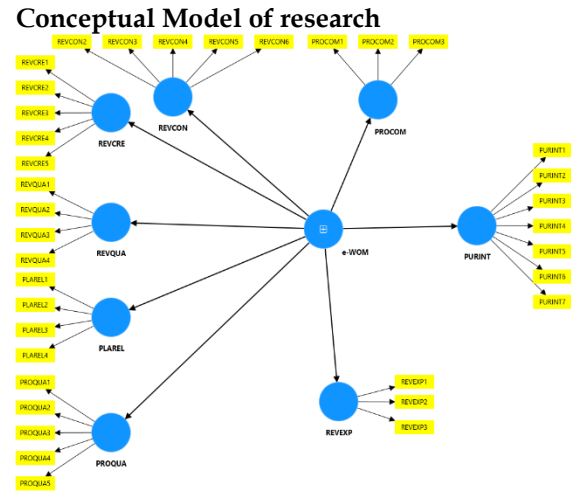


Fig. 1. Proposed conceptual model

### Sample demographics

The sample population (N=459) exhibits diverse demographic characteristics and preferences in e-tailing websites across different cities in table 1 below. Gender distribution shows a slight majority of males (56.9%) compared to females (43.1%), while the majority of respondents are unmarried (91.1%). In terms of education, a significant portion holds undergraduate degrees (58.8%), followed by postgraduate qualifications (24.2%). Most respondents identify as students (83.7%) and fall within the income bracket of 15000-30000 (55.6%). Age-wise, the sample is predominantly young, with 87.1% aged between 18-24 years. Geographically, respondents are spread across various cities, with Chandigarh (20.9%) and Delhi (17.0%) having the highest representation. When it comes to e-tailing websites, Amazon emerges as the most popular choice (50.1%), followed by Flipkart (40.3%), with Meesho and Myntra having smaller percentages.

Table 1: Distribution of sample (N=459)

Demographic variables	Categories	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Male	56.9
	Female	43.1
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	8.9
	Unmarried	91.1
<b>Education</b>	No formal education	3.5
	SSC or below	1.3
	Inter/diploma	8.3
	U. G	58.8
	P. G	24.2
	Ph.D. or above	3.9
<b>Profession</b>	Student	83.7
	Private Job	12.6

Demographic variables	Categories	Percent
	Govt. Job	.7
	Business	2.0
	Unemployed	1.1
Income	15000- 30000	55.6
	30001-60000	24.2
	60001-90000	10.9
	90001-145000	5.0
	More than 145000	4.4
Age	18-24	87.1
	25-44	11.5
	45-64	1.1
	above 65	.2
City wise distribution of respondents	Chandigarh	20.9
	Delhi	17.0
	Pune	9.2
	Patna	11.5
	Jaipur	10.5
	Dehradun	10.2
	Bangalore	11.5
e_tailing websites	Mumbai	9.2
	Amazon	50.1
	Flipkart	40.3
	Myntra	8.7

Source: Authors' Own

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The process of construct development is complex and requires a detailed literature review to form a solid foundation (Netemeyer et al., 2003). Through a detailed review of existing literature, a comprehensive understanding of the components and manifestations of eWOM was achieved. Various dimensions of eWOM were explored, including PLAREL, PROCOM, PROQUA, REVCON, REVCRE, REVEXP, and REVQUA. To complement the insights gained from the literature, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts and practitioners in the field of eWOM. These interviews not only validated the findings from the literature review but also

provided valuable new insights, particularly concerning the perspectives of e-tailers (Torres, and Augusto, 2019).

### Construct reliability and validity

The Reliability Statistics in Table 2 revealed that Cronbach's Alpha value, based on standardized 45 items, indicated high reliability, with the consistency of the responses for a sample size of N=459. These primary Cronbach's Alpha values (>0.6) signify the consistency of the responses (Hair et al., 2017). This high level of consistency underscores the reliability of the questionnaire in measuring the constructs of interest accurately.

### Measurement Model

The research unfolded through a series of steps, encompassing the measurement of model fit, estimation of observed and latent variables, assessment of convergent validity, and evaluation of discriminant validity. The findings were systematically presented across Tables 2, 3, and 4, which delineated standardized estimates for electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) constructs and indicators, the model's goodness of fit concerning eWOM constructs, and the test for convergent validity, respectively. Convergent validity was ascertained by examining the average variance extracted and construct reliability, which needed to meet thresholds of 50% or above and 60% or above, correspondingly. Furthermore, the test for discriminant validity was undertaken to gauge the degree to which concepts were distinct, achieved by juxtaposing the correlation values against the average variance extracted. The investigation confirmed the presence of discriminant validity within the eWOM constructs.

Table 2: Construct reliability and validity

	Variable/ Parameter	Code	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
IDV	Platform reliability- 1st Order-Reflective	PLAREL	0.759	0.760	0.847	0.581
	Product complexity- 1st Order-Reflective	PROCOM	0.693	0.695	0.830	0.619
	Product quality- 1st Order-Reflective	PROQUA	0.765	0.766	0.842	0.516
	Review consistency- 1st Order-Reflective	REVCON	0.754	0.757	0.836	0.505
	Review credibility- 1st Order-Reflective	REVCRE	0.775	0.777	0.848	0.528
	Reviewer expertise- 1st Order-Reflective	REVEXP	0.686	0.687	0.827	0.614
	Review quality- 1st Order-Reflective	REVQUA	0.731	0.739	0.832	0.554
	Electronic Word of Mouth- 2nd Order-Reflective	e-WOM	0.941	0.942	0.946	0.579
DV	Purchase Intention-1st Order-Reflective	PURINT	0.848	0.849	0.885	0.524

Source: Authors' own work

**Table 3: Outer Loading and VIF of first order constructs**

Items	Outer Loading (OL)	Sample mean (OL)	(STDEV_OL)	( O/STDEV )	P values	VIF
PLAREL1 <- PLAREL	0.759	0.759	0.022	33.872	0.000	1.966
PLAREL2 <- PLAREL	0.784	0.784	0.024	32.088	0.000	1.548
PLAREL3 <- PLAREL	0.775	0.775	0.025	31.187	0.000	1.521
PLAREL4 <- PLAREL	0.729	0.728	0.032	22.857	0.000	1.376
PROCOM1 <- PROCOM	0.783	0.783	0.024	32.517	0.000	1.345
PROCOM2 <- PROCOM	0.761	0.761	0.027	28.194	0.000	1.719
PROCOM3 <- PROCOM	0.815	0.815	0.019	42.802	0.000	1.403
PROQUA1 <- PROQUA	0.681	0.680	0.030	22.959	0.000	1.651
PROQUA2 <- PROQUA	0.698	0.697	0.030	23.610	0.000	1.352
PROQUA3 <- PROQUA	0.743	0.742	0.029	25.992	0.000	1.532
PROQUA4 <- PROQUA	0.729	0.728	0.031	23.588	0.000	1.507
PROQUA5 <- PROQUA	0.740	0.740	0.024	31.149	0.000	1.543
PURINT1 <- PURINT	0.740	0.739	0.022	33.135	0.000	1.680
PURINT2 <- PURINT	0.734	0.733	0.028	26.674	0.000	1.645
PURINT3 <- PURINT	0.752	0.752	0.025	30.310	0.000	1.774
PURINT4 <- PURINT	0.695	0.694	0.034	20.696	0.000	1.527
PURINT5 <- PURINT	0.743	0.743	0.026	28.179	0.000	1.710
PURINT6 <- PURINT	0.705	0.704	0.030	23.674	0.000	1.571
PURINT7 <- PURINT	0.697	0.696	0.031	22.667	0.000	1.554
REVCON2 <- REVCON	0.669	0.668	0.036	18.549	0.000	1.563
REVCON3 <- REVCON	0.722	0.722	0.030	24.175	0.000	1.676
REVCON4 <- REVCON	0.749	0.749	0.026	29.308	0.000	1.514
REVCON5 <- REVCON	0.738	0.738	0.025	29.526	0.000	1.809
REVCON6 <- REVCON	0.672	0.672	0.032	21.194	0.000	1.288
REVCRE1 <- REVCRE	0.655	0.655	0.032	20.432	0.000	1.270
REVCRE2 <- REVCRE	0.721	0.720	0.030	23.725	0.000	1.707
REVCRE3 <- REVCRE	0.791	0.791	0.024	33.463	0.000	1.738
REVCRE4 <- REVCRE	0.730	0.730	0.029	25.318	0.000	1.955
REVCRE5 <- REVCRE	0.731	0.731	0.029	25.407	0.000	1.497
REVEXP1 <- REVEXP	0.765	0.765	0.025	30.032	0.000	1.646
REVEXP2 <- REVEXP	0.807	0.806	0.024	32.943	0.000	1.395
REVEXP3 <- REVEXP	0.780	0.779	0.026	30.427	0.000	1.732
REVQUA1 <- REVQUA	0.675	0.674	0.038	17.758	0.000	1.443
REVQUA2 <- REVQUA	0.762	0.761	0.025	30.576	0.000	1.411
REVQUA3 <- REVQUA	0.798	0.798	0.020	39.355	0.000	1.886
REVQUA4 <- REVQUA	0.737	0.737	0.031	23.787	0.000	1.629

*Source: Authors' own work*

Hair et al. (2022) offers guidelines for the initial evaluation of measurement models and the same has been used in this study. Table 2 presents the reliability of indicators for all latent constructs, along with internal consistency (measured by Henseler's RhoA and composite reliability) and convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE). The indicator loadings in Table 3 for all constructs surpass the critical value of 0.70 (Sarstedt et al., 2017), except for one item of

Revcon1, which was not retained in the model because the AVE value was less than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2022).

The Model fit indices for a saturated model and an estimated model were obtained in Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). For the SRMR, the saturated model has a value of 0.091 compared to 0.093 for the estimated model. The d\_ULS value is lower for the saturated model at 17.889 compared to 18.366

for the estimated model. However, both models have similar NFI values, with 0.919 for the saturated model and 0.918 for the estimated model. Overall, while the saturated model shows slightly better fit based on SRMR and d\_ULS values, the differences between the two models are minimal, suggesting comparable goodness of fit.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) are commonly used to

bounds, assessed through 10,000 bootstrapping subsamples (Hair et al., 2022). According to the HTMT inference method, an HTMT ratio within a range of 1 is acceptable (Hair et al., 2022). Utilizing the confidence interval approach with 10,000 bootstraps, the lower and upper bounds were 0.736 and 0.908, respectively. Table 4 presents the discriminant validity of the constructs within the proposed model.

**Table 4: Discriminant validity Fornell-Larcker criterion**

	PLAREL	PROCOM	PROQUA	REVCON	REVCRE	REVEXP	REVQUA
PLAREL	<b>0.762</b>						
PROCOM	0.618	<b>0.787</b>					
PROQUA	0.709	0.636	<b>0.719</b>				
REVCON	0.702	0.621	0.703	<b>0.711</b>			
REVCRE	0.651	0.680	0.682	0.650	<b>0.727</b>		
REVEXP	0.557	0.560	0.549	0.531	0.624	<b>0.784</b>	
REVQUA	0.596	0.641	0.643	0.597	0.646	0.592	<b>0.744</b>
Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) - Matrix							
	PLAREL	PROCOM	PROQUA	REVCON	REVCRE	REVEXP	REVQUA
PLAREL							
PROCOM	0.848						
PROQUA	0.908	0.870					
REVCON	0.907	0.857	0.905				
REVCRE	0.846	0.905	0.884	0.848			
REVEXP	0.771	0.813	0.754	0.736	0.860		
REVQUA	0.791	0.893	0.854	0.799	0.854	0.836	

*Source: Authors' own work*

assess discriminant validity in structural equation modeling (SEM) studies. In Table 4, the values in the upper triangle represent the correlations between latent constructs, while the lower triangle shows the HTMT values. For the Fornell-Larcker criterion, discriminant validity is established when the square root of the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) for each construct is higher than the correlation between that construct and any other construct in the model. Looking at the diagonal values (bolded), the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds the correlations with other constructs, it indicates adequate discriminant validity. The discriminant validity of constructs was also established using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with values below the threshold of 0.85 indicating adequate discriminant validity. Specifically, HTMT ratios below 0.85 were observed (Henseler et al., 2015), affirming the distinctiveness of all latent variables. However, for prediction and judgment related to data security, the HTMT ratio exceeded 0.90 but fell within the 95 percent confidence intervals' lower and upper

### Structural equation model

The study utilised a structural equation modelling (SEM) approach to analyse the effect of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase intentions. To scrutinize the structural model results for hypothesis testing, we followed the guidelines outlined by Hair et al. (2019, 2022). Collinearity concerns were assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which yielded values below the critical threshold of 3.33 (Hair et al., 2019), confirming the absence of multicollinearity issues. Path coefficients' magnitude and significance in the structural model were presented in alignment with Saari et al. (2021), as detailed in Table 5. To accomplish our objective, two separate models were constructed. Model-1 illustrates the influence of specific dimensions of electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) on purchase intention. In Model-2, a second-order reflective construct was formed as independent variable using the repeated indicator approach, and its impact on purchase intention was examined. The outcomes from the SEM highlighted that several eWOM-related factors have a positive

influence on consumers' intentions to purchase. Notably, factors such as review consistency, review quality, review credibility, reviewer expertise, product quality, product complexity, and platform reliability were all found to impact consumer purchase intentions positively. Review consistency and Platform reliability were identified as having the most substantial impact as indicated by a standardized beta estimate. The results of Table 5 and Figure 2 indicate that the first-order reflective constructs (PLAREL, PROCOM, PROQUA, REVCON, and REVCRE) all have a significant positive influence on purchase intention, as evidenced by their rejection of the null hypothesis and low p-values. However, the constructs of REVEXP and REVQUA show insignificant effects on purchase intention, as their null hypotheses are accepted. These findings suggest that dimensions such as platform reliability, product complexity, product quality, review consistency, and review credibility significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions, while reviewer expertise and review quality show negligible impacts.



Figure2: Path model-1  
Source: Author's Own

Table 5: Path coefficients\_Model-1

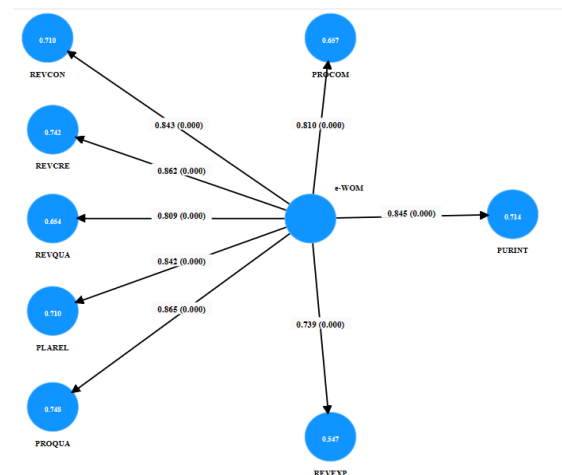
Path coefficients	Beta value	Sample mean (M)	T statistics	P values	C.I (2.5%)	C.I (0.975)	Hypothesis Decision
PLAREL -> PURINT	0.244	0.245	5.133	0.000	0.151	0.338	H0 Rejected, Significant Effect
PROCOM -> PURINT	0.119	0.118	2.976	0.003	0.039	0.197	H0 Rejected, Significant Effect
PROQUA -> PURINT	0.192	0.193	4.077	0.000	0.102	0.286	H0 Rejected, Significant Effect
REVCON -> PURINT	0.235	0.234	5.600	0.000	0.153	0.317	H0 Rejected, Significant Effect
REVCRE -> PURINT	0.155	0.155	3.062	0.002	0.055	0.254	H0 Rejected, Significant Effect
REVEXP -> PURINT	0.031	0.029	0.773	0.440	-0.048	0.109	H0 Accepted, Insignificant Effect
REVQUA -> PURINT	0.031	0.034	0.733	0.464	-0.050	0.119	H0 Accepted, Insignificant Effect

Source: Authors' Own

### Overall effect of E-WOM on Purchase Intention:

In the Model-2, the path coefficient between the second-order reflective construct, e-WOM, and purchase intention (PURINT) is 0.845. This indicates a strong positive relationship, with higher values of e-WOM associated with increased purchase intention.

The beta value of 0.845 also signifies the standardized effect size of this relationship (R-square=0.714, f-square=2.491). The sample mean for e-WOM and PURINT is both 0.845, suggesting that the average scores for both constructs within the sample are identical. The high t-statistic of 53.847 and the extremely low p-value of 0.000 indicate the statistical significance of this relationship, providing strong evidence that e-WOM significantly influences purchase intention.



Source: Authors' Own  
Figure3: Model 2- Path Model Relationship with second-order constructs

**Table 5a: Path coefficients and Total Effect- Model-2**

	Beta value	Sample mean (M)	T-statistics	P values
e-WOM -> PLAREL	0.842	0.843	55.416	0.000
e-WOM -> PROCOM	0.810	0.811	42.048	0.000
e-WOM -> PROQUA	0.865	0.865	51.831	0.000
e-WOM -> REVCON	0.843	0.842	43.000	0.000
e-WOM -> REVCRE	0.862	0.862	54.127	0.000
e-WOM -> REVEXP	0.739	0.741	29.185	0.000
e-WOM -> REVQUA	0.809	0.810	41.736	0.000
<b>e-WOM -&gt; PURINT</b>	<b>0.845</b>	<b>0.845</b>	<b>53.847</b>	<b>0.000</b>

Source: Authors' Own

Table 5 and 5a provides the path coefficients for Model-1, highlighting the impact of various predictors on purchase intention (PURINT). Platform reliability (PLAREL) has a significant positive effect on purchase intention (Beta = 0.244, T-statistics = 5.133,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that higher perceived reliability of the platform enhances consumers' intention to purchase. Product complexity (PROCOM) also shows a significant positive influence on purchase intention (Beta = 0.119, T-statistics = 2.976,  $p = 0.003$ ), indicating that the complexity of the product contributes to the purchase decision. Product quality (PROQUA) significantly affects purchase intention (Beta = 0.192, T-statistics = 4.077,  $p < 0.001$ ), demonstrating that higher product quality increases the likelihood of purchase.

Review consistency (REVCON) has a significant positive impact on purchase intention (Beta = 0.235, T-statistics = 5.600,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that consistent reviews boost consumer confidence and purchase intention. Review credibility (REVCRE) also positively influences purchase intention (Beta = 0.155, T-statistics = 3.062,  $p = 0.002$ ), showing that credible reviews play a crucial role in shaping purchase intentions. Reviewer expertise (REVEXP) (Beta = 0.031, T-statistics = 0.773,  $p = 0.440$ ) and Review quality (REVQUA) (Beta = 0.031, T-statistics = 0.733,  $p = 0.464$ ) did not significantly affect purchase intention, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis for these paths.

In Model-2, the total effect of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on dependent construct was analysed. e-WOM has a strong positive influence on purchase intention (Beta = 0.845, T-statistics = 53.847,  $p < 0.001$ ). The strong and significant relationships across all these paths highlight the importance of e-WOM as a vital strategy in digital marketing, especially for

enhancing platform reliability, product quality, and review credibility, all of which contribute to increased purchase intentions.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the critical role of online reviews in moulding consumer purchase intentions, with significant positive relationships identified between review consistency, quality, credibility, reviewer expertise, platform reliability, and the intention to purchase.

**These findings align with existing theoretical frameworks of Tran (2020); Lee (2009); Jiménez and Mendoza (2013) and Chakraborty (2019) emphasizing the role of various attributes in shaping consumer decision-making processes.** Moreover, the insignificant effects of reviewer expertise and review quality suggest avenues for further exploration and refinement of theoretical models to better understand the nuanced dynamics at play in consumer decision-making processes. The robust influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on purchase intention highlights the critical role of online consumer reviews and recommendations in driving purchasing decisions. Businesses and marketers can leverage this insight by focusing on strategies to enhance and manage online reputation, encourage positive reviews, and engage with consumers effectively on digital platforms.

### Implications of the study

The study holds practical significance for businesses that rely on electronic word-of-mouth as a source to promote their products or services. The findings suggest that electronic word-of-mouth positively influences consumers' intention to purchase, with review consistency, credibility, and platform reliability being significant predictors

of purchase intention. Therefore, businesses should pay attention to the consistency and credibility of the reviews on their platforms and ensure that their platform is reliable. This can be achieved by implementing measures such as verifying the identity of reviewers, moderating reviews to ensure they are genuine and not fake or biased, and ensuring that the platform is secure and user-friendly. Businesses can further capitalize the influence of electronic word-of-mouth by encouraging satisfied customers to share positive reviews on their platform and by addressing negative reviews in a constructive manner. This results in trust building and enhancing credibility along with the business's overall reputation among customers. In addition, businesses can consider partnering with influencers or brand ambassadors who have a large following on social media platforms to promote their products or services. This can increase the reach and visibility of the business and generate more positive electronic word-of-mouth. Finally, the findings of this study also highlight the importance of providing high-quality products or services to customers. Even with positive electronic word-of-mouth, consumers are unlikely to purchase if they do not perceive the product or service as high quality. Therefore, businesses should prioritize delivering high-quality products or services and ensuring that customer satisfaction is a top priority. The practical implications of this study suggest that businesses should prioritize building trust and credibility with customers through electronic word-of-mouth, ensuring the quality and reliability of their platform, to drive consumer purchase intention.

#### **CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The result of the study indicates that eWOM has a significant favorable influence on consumer's intention to purchase. The study concludes that review consistency, review credibility, reviewer expertise, and platform reliability are significant predictors of purchase intention whereas review quality has a non-significant effect on purchase intention. In Model-2, the total effect of e-WOM on purchase intention was profoundly positive (Significant Beta value = 0.845), indicating that e-WOM significantly enhances the likelihood of purchase in e-tailing industry. This strong influence aligns with previous studies which

have also emphasized the importance of e-WOM in consumer decision-making processes (Zhu et al., 2020; Chatterjee, 2001).

Furthermore, Model-1 results revealed several key factors significantly affecting purchase intention. Platform reliability had a notable positive effect on purchase intention (Significant Beta = 0.244), highlighting that consumers' trust in the platform is crucial for their purchasing decisions. This finding is consistent with Lin, Lee, and Horng (2011), who found that high-quality online reviews positively impact purchase intentions. Product complexity also positively influenced purchase intention (Significant Beta=0.119). This suggests that detailed and complex product information can aid consumers in their purchase decisions, supporting the notion that consumers value comprehensive product details in online reviews (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013).

The impact of product quality on purchase intention was significant as well (Significant Beta = 0.192). High-quality products naturally lead to higher purchase intentions, resonating with findings by Lee (2009), who noted that review quality significantly affects purchase decisions. Review consistency and review credibility also significantly impacted purchase intentions (Significant Beta values = 0.235 and 0.155 respectively). Consistent and credible reviews build consumer trust and confidence, crucially influencing their purchase intentions, as echoed by Jiménez and Mendoza (2013) and Zhu et al. (2020).

Conversely, reviewer expertise (REVEXP) and review quality (REVQUA) did not show significant effects on purchase intention. These findings contrast with some previous studies (e.g., Lee, 2009), suggesting that while expertise and quality are generally important, they may not be as critical in all contexts or for all consumers.

The findings have important implications for marketers and businesses, as they highlight the importance of managing and leveraging eWOM to enhance consumers' buying intentions. The study suggests that businesses should focus on positive online reviews, reviewers' expertise, and the platform's reliability, to enhance consumers' purchase intentions.

Firstly, the study was conducted in a specific context, and cannot be generalizable to other contexts. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases and inaccuracies. Future studies should overcome these limitations by using more significant and diverse samples and incorporating objective measures of eWOM.

Future research could explore the influence of electronic word-of-mouth on the intention to purchase in different contexts or industries. The study could be replicated in different countries to examine how cultural differences may affect the impact of electronic word-of-mouth on purchase intention. Additionally, the study could be extended to examine the influence of electronic word-of-mouth on different types of products, such as luxury goods or high-tech products. Future studies can also investigate the moderating effects of individual differences such as personality traits, gender, or age on the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention. It would be interesting to explore the personality traits, such as extraversion etc., that could have a moderate influence of electronic word-of-mouth on buying intentions. Furthermore, the study could also be expanded to examine the impact of different types of electronic word-of-mouth, such as product reviews, social media posts, or influencer marketing, on purchase intention. This could provide insights into the effectiveness of different types of electronic word-of-mouth in influencing consumer behavior.

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