EFFECT OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH COMMUNICATION ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND PURCHASE DECISION IN QUICK COMMERCE BUSINESS – AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

As quick commerce platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart gain traction, understanding the impact of eWOM becomes crucial for developing effective marketing campaigns. This research paper explores the role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in influencing customer loyalty and purchase decisions within the quick commerce sector. The study employs the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model to analyze how various dimensions of eWOM—such as Customer Level Engagement (CLE), Social Media Platform Engagement (SMPE), and Influencer Partnership Engagement (IPE)—affect customer attitudes and behaviors. The findings show that CLE, SMPE and IPE contribute to effective eWOM and significantly influence purchase decisions but does not have any significant impact on customer loyalty. This research fills a notable gap in existing literature by focusing specifically on quick commerce, an area that has received limited attention compared to broader e-commerce contexts. The insights gained from this study provide valuable implications for quick commerce companies aiming to leverage eWOM as a strategic tool for customer acquisition and retention in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Keywords: electronic word of mouth, customer loyalty, purchase decisions, quick commerce, marketing strategies.

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of e-commerce has given rise to quick commerce, henceforth referred to as QC, a sector characterized by the promise of delivering goods to customers within an exceptionally short timeframe, often in under 10 minutes (Kapoor, Sindwani & Goel, 2023). This model has gained significant traction, particularly in urban areas where customers increasingly demand convenience and immediacy in their shopping experiences (Mukhopadhyay, 2022). As competition intensifies among quick commerce platforms such as Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart, effective marketing strategies have become paramount for attracting and retaining customers (Tanuja, 2024). One such strategy that has emerged as a powerful tool in influencing customer behavior is electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

eWOM refers to the online sharing of opinions, experiences, and recommendations regarding products or services through digital platforms, including social media, review sites, and e-commerce applications (Choi, 2020). Unlike traditional word of mouth, which is limited to face-to-face interactions, eWOM can reach a vast audience instantaneously, making it a critical component of modern marketing strategies (Roy, Datta, Mukherjee & Basu, 2021). The significance of eWOM lies in its ability to shape customer perceptions and decisions; studies have shown that customers trust online reviews and recommendations as much as personal referrals from friends and family. This trust is particularly crucial in the QC sector, where customers may be hesitant to try new services without credible endorsements (Yusuf, Che, Hussin & Busalim, 2018).

The application of eWOM in promoting QC involves leveraging customer feedback and experiences to enhance brand visibility and credibility. Companies like Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart utilize various promotional strategies that encourage satisfied customers to share their positive experiences online. These strategies can include incentivizing reviews, engaging with customers on social media, and collaborating with influencers who can amplify their messages. By fostering a culture of sharing among users, these companies can create a network of brand advocates who contribute to positive eWOM, ultimately driving customer acquisition and retention (Kapoor, Sindwani & Goel, 2023). This research paper explores the application of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a pivotal promotional tool in QC, to find out whether eWOM contributes to customer loyalty and purchase decision in this sector.

Theoretical frameworks such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model provide valuable insights into understanding how eWOM influences customer behavior (Chopdar and Balakrishnan, 2020). The SOR model posits that external stimuli (in this case, customer level engagement, social media platform engagement, and influencer partnership engagement) affect internal psychological states (such as eWOM), leading to specific behavioral responses (like customer loyalty and purchasing decisions). Applying this framework allows researchers to analyze how different aspects of eWOM—such as customer level engagement (CLE), social media platform engagement (SMPE) and influencer partnership engagement (IPE) — impact customer attitudes toward brands like Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart (Roy, Paul, Tiwari & Mookherjee, 2024). Recent studies have highlighted the dual nature of eWOM; while positive reviews can enhance brand perception and encourage purchases, negative reviews can deter potential customers (Kapoor *et al*. 2023; Roy *et al*. 2024). This paradox necessitates a nuanced understanding of how companies can effectively manage their eWOM strategies to increase customer loyalty and influence purchasing decisions.

Despite the growing body of literature on the effect of eWOM on e-commerce and s-commerce companies, there remains a lack of incisive studies focusing specifically on promotional strategies of QC companies. While much of the existing literature explores eWOM in broader social commerce and e-commerce contexts, there is a notable lack of research specifically addressing QC platforms. Studies such as those by Kapoor *et al*. (2023) and Roy *et al*. (2024) provide insights into service experiences and purchasing decisions but do not delve deeply into the unique dynamics of quick commerce, where speed and immediacy are critical factors. This research aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of how each platform leverages eWOM to enhance their market presence and exploring how eWOM functions differently in quick commerce compared to traditional e-commerce settings.

This research work addresses the following research questions:
RQ1: Does customer level engagement significantly influence eWOM in the context of QC?
RQ2: Does social media platform engagement significantly influence eWOM in the context of QC?
RQ3: Does influencer partnership engagement significantly influence eWOM in the context of QC?
RQ4: Does eWOM have a significant impact on customer loyalty in the context of QC?
RQ5: Does eWOM have a significant impact on purchase decisions in the context of QC?

The significance of this research lies in understanding how eWOM influences customer behavior in the context of quick commerce. As competition intensifies, particularly with the entry of established e-commerce giants like Amazon and Flipkart into the QC space, businesses must adapt their marketing strategies to sustain growth. Investigating eWOM's role can provide insights into effective promotional tactics that enhance brand visibility and customer loyalty. The interplay between eWOM and QC presents a rich area for research. As the QC sector continues to grow, exploring these dynamics will be essential for developing effective marketing strategies that resonate with customers' evolving expectations for speed, quality, and reliability in their shopping experiences. This research aims to contribute to existing literature by making an effort to understand how QC platforms are

harnessing the power of eWOM and whether these strategies lead to customer retention and purchasing decisions.

2. Literature Review

The literature on electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and its implications in e-commerce, mobile commerce, social commerce and quick commerce has evolved significantly, addressing various dimensions of customer behavior and marketing strategies. Yusuf *et al*. (2018) have focused on the engagement aspect of eWOM within social commerce, revealing its significant influence on customer purchase intentions. Their findings indicate that active engagement with eWOM can transform customer perceptions and lead to increased purchasing behavior. Dashti *et al*. (2019) extended the SOR model to analyze factors influencing social commerce intentions among users of social networks. Their findings revealed that website quality, perceived interactivity, and subjective norms act as stimuli affecting relationship quality and attitudes toward social commerce. This study emphasizes the role of social support as a mediator in enhancing customers' intentions to engage with social commerce platforms.

Building on this foundation, Choi (2020) investigated the antecedents of eWOM in social commerce, identifying factors such as attitude toward eWOM, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as significant drivers of eWOM engagement. The findings suggest that a favorable attitude towards eWOM not only increases its prevalence but also positively influences purchase intentions. This study contributes to the understanding of how customer attitudes shape eWOM dynamics in online environments.

In a related context, Chopdar and Balakrishnan (2020) applied the SOR framework to examine customer responses to mobile commerce applications. Their research indicated that perceived ubiquity and app incentives are crucial predictors of impulsive behavior and perceived value in m-commerce settings. This work underscores the importance of app quality in fostering positive customer experiences that can lead to enhanced loyalty and eWOM.

Cheng *et al*. (2021) explored the paradox of word-of-mouth in social commerce, emphasizing the dual impacts of source credibility and information quality on social word of mouth (SWOM) spreading. Their study, grounded in the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) paradigm, reveals that while credible sources can enhance positive SWOM intentions, they may also provoke psychological reactance and negative SWOM under certain conditions. This nuanced understanding highlights the complexity of customer responses to eWOM stimuli.

Roy *et al*. (2021) investigated the interplay between eWOM stimuli and perceived service quality in the context of tourism services. They find that eWOM characteristics like volume and valence directly influence perceived service quality, which subsequently affects online recommendation intentions. This research illustrates how effective eWOM management can enhance service perceptions and drive customer recommendations.

Mukhopadhyay (2022) explored the transition from traditional ecommerce to QC within the Indian grocery sector, focusing on the role of dark stores. This case study examined how startups like Zepto have capitalized on rapid delivery demands during the pandemic by leveraging dark store models. The author discussed various challenges faced by this sector, including human capital issues, sustainability concerns, and shifting customer behaviors. The case provided insights into how established players are adapting to these disruptions and highlights lessons learned that could inform future strategies for hyperlocal delivery services.

Kapoor *et al*. (2023) further explored the QC service experience using a moderated mediated framework based on the SOR theory. Their research highlighted that dimensions such as app design and security assurance significantly impact customer loyalty, with eWOM valence moderating these relationships. This study provided valuable insights into optimizing quick commerce strategies to enhance customer retention through effective eWOM management.

The pandemic has been a pivotal factor in reshaping customer preferences and distribution channels within the fast-moving customer goods (FMCG) sector. Guru et al. (2023) investigated the feasibility of hyperlocal

delivery models as effective distribution channels during this period. Their study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses to assess factors influencing channel selection among FMCG companies in India. The findings indicated that while modern trade has emerged as the preferred distribution channel post-pandemic, hyperlocal delivery models are deemed economically unviable in the long term.

Kadam *et al*. (2023) delved into customer demographics and decision-making processes regarding online grocery shopping in Navi Mumbai. Utilizing exploratory research techniques, their study revealed that technological innovations significantly influence customer perceptions and acceptance of digital platforms for grocery shopping. The research underscored the importance of customer learning and social acceptance in shaping attitudes towards online grocery shopping, suggesting that these factors are critical for the success of digital retail platforms.

Tanuja (2024) conducted a comparative study between two major players in the Indian hyperlocal grocery delivery industry: Blinkit and Big Basket. This research evaluated their financial performances from 2022 to 2024 amidst growing competition and market acceptance of quick commerce. The results indicated that both companies were experiencing positive growth trends, with increasing profitability and successful strategic partnerships with larger retailers. This analysis contributed to understanding how competitive dynamics shape operational strategies within the hyperlocal delivery landscape.

Roy *et al*. (2024) investigated the impact of eWOM on purchasing decisions, identifying characteristics that influence a buyer's intention to purchase goods and services. Their study examined how perceived information quality and source trustworthiness affect eWOM credibility, revealing differential impacts on purchase intentions for commodities versus services. Yaqub et al. (2023) focused on social media influencer marketing's dynamics within the SOR framework, analyzing its relationship with brand awareness and customer purchase decisions. The study found that brand awareness significantly influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing and eWOM dissemination, highlighting the importance of integrating brand strategies with eWOM initiatives.

Xue et al. (2024) examined how technical and situational cues affect impulse buying behavior in social commerce applications using the SOR framework. Their findings revealed that both technical cues (ease of use, visual appeal) and situational cues (boredom-induced browsing) positively influenced impulse buying behavior, offering marketers insights into how to encourage purchases during casual browsing sessions.

Overall, this chronological literature review demonstrated a clear trajectory in understanding the multifaceted nature of eWOM within e-commerce, mobile commerce, social commerce and QC contexts. The integration of models like SOR provided a robust framework for analyzing customer behavior, highlighting how various stimuli influence internal states and lead to specific behavioral responses such as loyalty and advocacy through eWOM. As the competitive business scenario continues to evolve, there is a necessity to explore these dynamics across different cultural contexts and technological advancements, enriching the understanding of customer interactions in digital marketplaces.

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses have been formulated:
H1: Customer level engagement has a significant influence eWOM in the context of quick commerce.
H2: Social media platform engagement has a significant influence on eWOM in the context of quick commerce.
H3: Influencer partnership engagement has a significant influence on eWOM in the context of quick commerce.
H4: eWOM has a significant impact on customer loyalty in the context of quick commerce.
H5: eWOM has a significant impact on purchase decisions in the context of quick commerce.
Based on the literature review and the formulated hypotheses, the following conceptual model has been proposed and the diagram is given in Figure - 1:

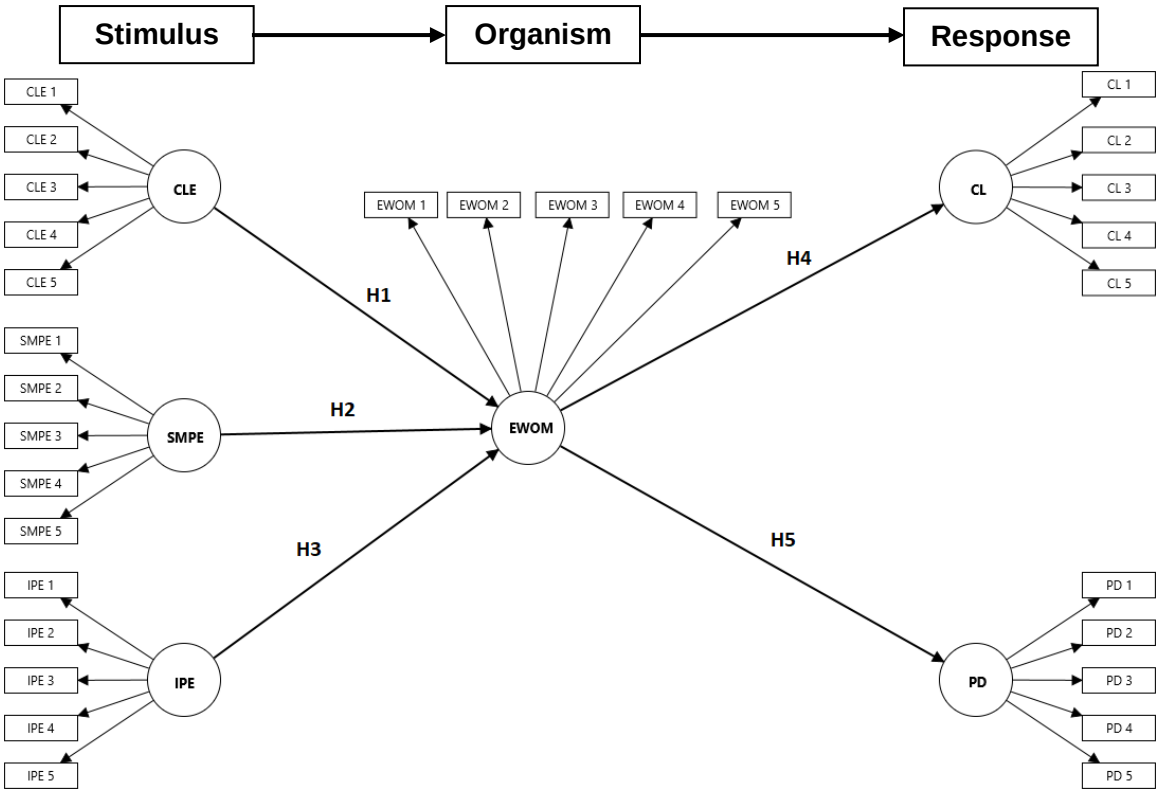

Figure – 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

Source: Author's Research

CLE→Customer Level Engagement, SMPE → Social Media Platform Engagement, IPE → Influencer Partnership Engagement, EWOM → Electronic Word of Mouth, CL → Customer Loyalty, PD → Purchase Decision

3. SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) Theory

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory given by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) provides a theoretical framework for interpreting user behavior. The theory is that external stimuli drive the state of the internal organism, which in turn triggers a behavioral response from the user. The SOR model provides a valuable framework for understanding customer behavior in various contexts, including the application of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) for promoting QC. This model can be effectively utilized to analyze the promotional strategies employed by companies like Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart.

In the context of eWOM and QC, stimuli refers to external factors that influence customer perceptions and behaviors. These can include customer level engagement by offering them incentives to provide positive reviews, social media platform engagement by highlighting positive reviews given by actual users and influencers and influencer partnership engagement using third party reviews. For example, if Zepto runs a social media campaign showcasing customer testimonials about its rapid delivery service, this serves as a stimulus that can attract new customers and enhance existing customers' perceptions (Dashti, Dolatabadi & Javadi, 2019).

The organism component represents the EWOM advocacy to the customer, which invokes their emotions, perceptions, and cognitive evaluations in response to the stimuli. Factors influencing this internal state may include emotional responses and cognitive appraisal, in the context of eWOM. A customer who receives a fast delivery from Blinkit may feel satisfaction and happiness, leading them to perceive the brand positively and be more likely to share this experience with others (Roy, Paul, Tiwari & Mookherjee, 2024).

The response component reflects the behavioral outcomes resulting from the interaction between stimuli and the organism's internal state. In QC, responses can be manifested as brand loyalty and positive purchase decision. If a customer shares a positive review about Zepto's efficient service on social media after receiving a timely delivery, this not only reinforces their loyalty but also serves as an influential recommendation for potential new customers (Roy, Datta, Mukherjee & Basu, 2021).

The SOR model provides a structured approach for researching the application of eWOM in promoting quick commerce by examining how external stimuli influence customer emotions and behaviors. By applying this model to analyze Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart and other QC companies promotional strategies, researchers can gain insights into effective marketing practices that enhance customer loyalty through positive eWOM. This understanding is crucial for developing targeted strategies that leverage eWOM as a powerful tool in the competitive landscape of quick commerce.

The SOR model is designed to explore how external stimuli affects internal psychological states, leading to behavioral responses. This aligns perfectly with the research focus on eWOM, where promotional strategies (stimuli) influence customer perceptions and emotions (organism), ultimately driving eWOM behaviors (responses). The SOR model provides a robust framework for analyzing the application of eWOM in promoting quick commerce by focusing on the interplay between external stimuli, internal psychological states, and behavioral responses. The SOR framework has been widely applied in digital marketing contexts, including e-commerce and social media engagement. This makes it particularly relevant for studying QC platforms that rely heavily on digital interactions (Kapoor, Sindwani & Goel, 2023).

4. Research Methodology

This study employed an exploratory research approach, combining literature review with quantitative surveys and analysis. The constructs identified for the research were CLE (Customer Level Engagement), SMPE (Social Media Platform Engagement), IPE (Influencer Partnership Engagement), EWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth), CL (Customer Loyalty) and PD (Purchase Decision). The constructs and scale items were identified from extant literature and research work done by eminent research scholars (Kapoor, Sindwani & Goel, 2023; Roy, Paul, Tiwari & Mookherjee, 2024). A pilot study was carried out and the reliability and validity of constructs were checked by measuring through Cronbach Alpha and KMO-Bartlett test, which were found to be satisfactory.

The quantitative data was collected through an online questionnaire distributed to customers who have used services from Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart and other quick commerce companies within the last six months. A purposive sampling technique has been used to ensure representation across different demographics, including age, gender, and location. The sample size is determined to be 400 respondents to ensure statistical significance. The sample distribution of the respondents is given in Table No – 1.

Table No – 1: Sample Distribution of the respondents

	Characteristics	N	%
Gender	Male	215	53.8
	Female	185	46.2
Age	Below 21 Years	37	9.3
	21-30	106	26.4
	31-40	97	24.3
	41-50	91	22.7
	51 and above	69	17.3
Educational Qualification	School Level	53	13.3
	Undergraduate Level	137	34.3
	Post Graduation	128	32.0
	PhD	82	20.4
Region	Delhi NCR	77	19.25
	Mumbai	73	18.25
	Pune	37	9.25
	Bengaluru	69	17.25
	Chennai	52	13.00
	Hyderabad	57	14.25
	Kolkata	35	8.75
Monthly Income (INR)	Less than 50,000	98	24.4
	51,000-1,00,000	112	28.0
	1,00,000 - 2,00,000	105	26.3
	More than 2,00,000	85	21.3

The quantitative data has been analyzed using statistical software (SmartPLS 4.0) to conduct PLS-SEM analysis, while qualitative data from interviews has been thematically analyzed.

5. Data Analysis and Inferences

The data has been analyzed using the PLS-SEM (Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling) and SmartPLS 4.0 software. The analysis comprised of a systematic two-step process: Measurement Model Analysis and Structural Model Analysis. This approach ensured that the constructs were valid and reliable before examining the relationships among them (Hair *et al*., 2021). Additionally, the common method bias (CMB) was addressed to ensure the integrity of the findings.

5.1 Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model analysis focused on assessing the validity and reliability of the constructs used in the study, following the method given by Hair *et al*. (2021). This includes both reflective and formative measurement models. The indicator loadings of each of the items were found to be above 0.7 which confirmed that it adequately represents its construct (Hair *et al*. 2021). The internal consistency reliability was ascertained by measuring the Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability. Each item's loading has been found to be above 0.7 and hence significant and indicating acceptable reliability (Hair *et al*. 2021). The convergent validity was assessed through average variance extracted (AVE), where the AVE value greater than 0.5 indicated that the constructs explained more than half of the variance in its indicators (Hair *et al*. (2021). The values of measurement model analysis are given in Table No – 2.

Table No – 2: Measurement Model Analysis

Constructs	Items	Indicator Loadings	VIF	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Customer Level Engagement (CLE)				0.854	0.896	0.632
	CLE1	0.851	2.357			
	CLE2	0.801	2.040			
	CLE3	0.778	1.859			
	CLE4	0.782	1.663			
	CLE5	0.761	1.618			
Social Media Platform Engagement (SMPE)				0.875	0.886	0.660
	SMPE1	0.796	2.121			
	SMPE2	0.792	2.103			
	SMPE3	0.855	2.008			
	SMPE4	0.827	1.914			
	SMPE5	0.790	2.139			
Influencer Partnership Engagement (IPE)				0.871	0.884	0.654
	IPE1	0.765	1.945			
	IPE2	0.830	1.763			
	IPE3	0.863	2.441			
	IPE4	0.766	2.000			
	IPE5	0.814	2.102			
Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)				0.883	0.884	0.681
	EWOM1	0.863	2.638			
	EWOM2	0.811	2.003			
	EWOM3	0.818	2.221			
	EWOM4	0.803	1.874			
	EWOM5	0.829	2.146			
Customer Loyalty (CL)				0.844	0.848	0.591
	CL1	0.714	1.900			
	CL2	0.825	2.182			
	CL3	0.729	2.113			
	CL4	0.745	1.757			
	CL5	0.713	1.830			
Purchase Decision (PD)				0.830	0.880	0.596
	PD1	0.767	1.783			
	PD2	0.789	1.739			
	PD3	0.822	1.855			
	PD4	0.774	1.385			
	PD5	0.800	1.753			

Source: Author's Research

The discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) or by comparing the square root of AVE with inter-construct correlations. The values were below 0.85 for HTMT which suggested good discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). The values of discriminant validity analysis are given in Table No – 3.

Table No – 3: Discriminant Validity Analysis

	CL	CSE	EWOM	IPT	PD	SMPE
CL						
CLE	0.196					
EWOM	0.076	0.535				
IPE	0.115	0.459	0.339			
PD	0.113	0.095	0.303	0.331		
SMPE	0.179	0.216	0.175	0.183	0.192	

Source: Author's Research

As the required criteria have been met, it can be confirmed that the measurement model is robust and suitable for further analysis.

5.2 Structural Model Analysis

In the second step, the structural model analysis was conducted, which involved testing the hypothesized relationships among constructs.

5.2.1 Path Coefficient Evaluation:

The path coefficients were analyzed to determine the strength and significance of relationships between constructs. A bootstrapping procedure was used to assess significance levels, typically aiming for a t-value above 1.96 for a significance level of 0.05 (Hair *et al*. 2021). The path analysis and significance assessment are given in Table 4.

platforms positively influences eWOM, although the effect is relatively weaker than CLE. The hypothesis H3 has been validated and found significant (β=0.234, $p<0.001$). This strong positive coefficient indicates that influencer partnerships significantly enhance eWOM, highlighting their effectiveness in promotional strategies. The hypothesis H4 has not been validated and not found significant (β =0.040, $p>0.05$). This indicates that contrary to expectations, eWOM does not directly correlate with customer loyalty in the context of quick commerce. The hypothesis H5 has been validated and found significant (β=0.268, $p<0.001$). This strong positive relationship indicates that eWOM significantly influences purchasing decisions, affirming its critical role in marketing strategies.

5.2.2 Predictive Power:

The predictive power indicators such as R^2 for endogenous constructs, which indicates how much variance in the dependent variables is explained by independent variables. The higher R^2 values of EWOM, CL and PD signify that the proposed conceptual model has a better predictive power (Hair *et al*., 2021). The R^2 values of EWOM, CL and PD are given in Table 5.

Table No – 5: Predictive Power

	R-square	R-square adjusted
EWOM	0.544	0.538
CL	0.618	0.616
PD	0.668	0.666

Source: Author's Research

Table No – 4: Path Analysis

Path	β	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	Confidence Intervals		P values	Significance
				2.50%	97.50%		
H1: CLE → EWOM	0.189	0.052	3.563	0.087	0.290	0.000	Yes
H2: SMPE → EWOM	0.104	0.044	2.183	0.191	0.220	0.029	Yes
H3: IPE → EWOM	0.234	0.056	4.087	0.126	0.345	0.000	Yes
H4: EWOM → CL	0.040	0.151	0.894	-0.218	0.221	0.372	No
H5: EWOM→ PD	0.268	0.051	5.079	0.167	0.368	0.000	Yes

Source: Author's Research

The hypothesis H1 has been validated and found significant (β=0.189, $p<0.001$). This indicates a positive and significant relationship, suggesting that higher customer engagement levels lead to increased eWOM. The hypothesis H2 has been validated and found significant (β=0.104, $p<0.05$). This result shows that engagement on social media

5.2.3 Predictive Relevance:

The predictive relevance was assessed using Q^2 values obtained from blindfolding procedures (Hair *et al*., 2021). The obtained values from Q^2 analysis were found to be satisfactory and ensured that the model has predictive capabilities beyond mere explanation.

5.2.4 Model Fit Assessment:

In the context of PLS-SEM, evaluating the goodness of fit is essential for validating the model. Three key indices used in this assessment are the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Normed Fit Index (NFI). Each of these metrics provides unique insights into how well the proposed model aligns with the observed data. An SRMR value closer to 0 indicates a better fit, with values below 0.08 generally considered acceptable in PLS-SEM contexts. NFI values range from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 indicating a better fit. A commonly accepted threshold for an adequate fit is an NFI greater than 0.90 (Sathyanarayana & Mohana-sundaram, 2024).

Table No – 6: Model Fit Assessment

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.079	0.071
NFI	0.984	0.977

Source: Author's Research

The calculated SRMR and NFI values are given in Table No 6. The values indicate that the proposed research model has a good fit and aligns with the observed data.

5.2.5 Common Method Bias (CMB)

CMB can distort results in PLS-SEM due to shared method variance among indicators, often arising from self-reported data collection methods. The CMB was measured using Harman's Single Factor Test and Full Collinearity Test. The exploratory factor analysis on all items were done to check if a single factor accounts for most of the variance. The first factor explained less than 50%, suggesting that the problem of potential CMB is not present (Kock, 2020).

A full collinearity test was also carried out by measuring the variance inflation factors (VIF) values of all the items. The calculated VIF Values are shown in Table No 2. As all the VIF values are less than 3.3, it can be concluded that problem of multi-collinearity is not present in the proposed conceptual model (Hair *et al.*, 2021).

By following this two-step analysis process and addressing CMB effectively, the study has established that the findings are significant and accurately reflect the relationships among constructs in the PLS-SEM analysis. This structured approach not only enhanced the reliability of results but also contributed to more meaningful interpretations of data within the context of quick commerce and eWOM applications.

The validated model is given in Figure 2.

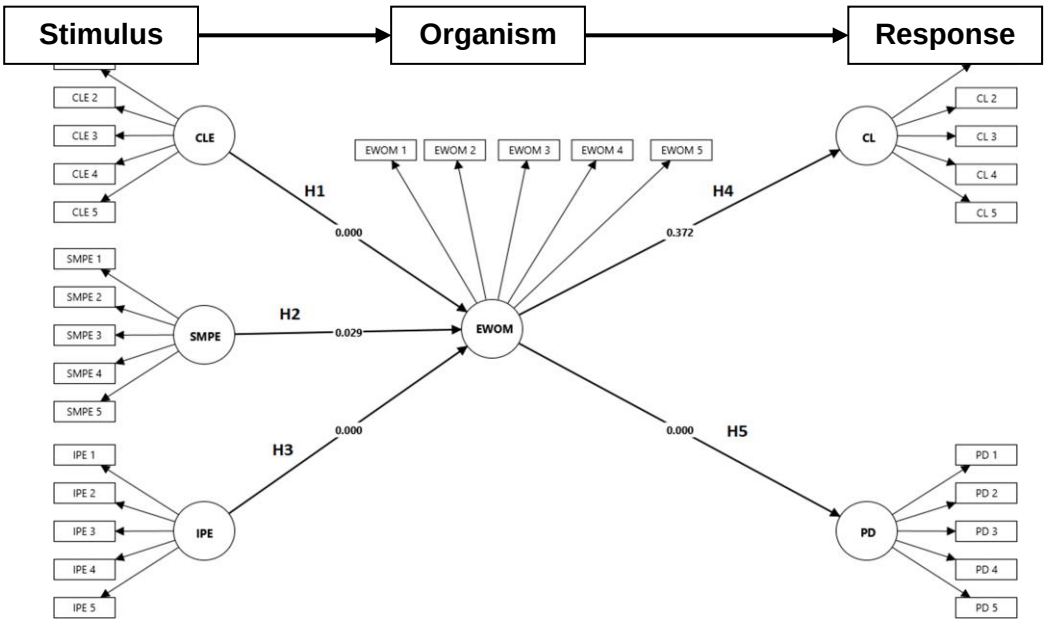

Figure – 2: Validated Model

Source: Author's Research

Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis aimed to explore whether customer level engagement (CLE), social media platform engagement (SMPE), and influencer partnership engagement (IPE) mediate the relationship between eWOM and customer outcomes such as loyalty and purchase decisions. The values obtained from mediation analysis are given in Table No – 8.

Table No – 8: Mediation Analysis

	β	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Significance
H6: CLE → EWOM → CL	0.009	0.03	0.847	0.397	No
H7: SMPE → EWOM → CL	-0.005	0.017	0.765	0.445	No
H8: IPE → EWOM → CL	0.009	0.037	0.846	0.398	No
H9: CLE → EWOM → PD	0.050	0.015	3.301	0.001	Yes
H10: SMPE → EWOM → PD	-0.028	0.013	1.855	0.044	Yes
H11: IPE → EWOM → PD	0.063	0.022	2.734	0.006	Yes

The mediation analysis revealed that CLE significantly influences eWOM, which subsequently impacts purchase decisions, thereby acting as a mediator in this relationship. SMPE also demonstrated significant mediation effects, suggesting that effective engagement strategies on social media enhance the impact of eWOM on purchasing behavior. While IPE showed a strong relationship with eWOM, its mediating role was less pronounced compared to CLE and SMPE, indicating that influencer strategies may need refinement to maximize. However, the mediation analysis revealed no significant mediating effect of eWOM between customer engagement (CLE, SMPE, IPE) and customer loyalty. This indicates that while engaged customers may generate purchase decision through eWOM, this does not necessarily foster loyalty toward the brand.

6. Discussion

The research paper explored the significant role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in influencing customer loyalty and purchase decisions within the QC sector. The examination of hypotheses testing and mediation analysis in the context of eWOM's influence on customer loyalty and purchase decisions in quick commerce revealed critical insights into the relationships between various constructs. The study's hypotheses were designed to explore how electronic word of mouth (eWOM) impacts customer behavior, specifically focusing on customer level engagement (CLE), social media platform engagement (SMPE), and influencer partnership engagement (IPE).

Customer level engagement (CLE) plays a crucial role in influencing electronic word of mouth (eWOM) within the QC sector, as evidenced by the findings of the exploratory study. The study validates the hypothesis that CLE significantly influences eWOM ($\beta=0.189$, $p<0.001$). This strong statistical significance suggests that when customers are more engaged through activities such as sharing experiences, providing feedback, or participating in discussions, they are more likely to generate positive eWOM. Engaged customers often feel a sense of community and loyalty towards the brand, which motivates them to share their positive experiences with others. For instance, prompt responses to customer inquiries or addressing concerns can lead to satisfied customers who are eager to share their positive experiences (Yusuf, Che, Hussin & Busalim, 2018).

While CLE has a significant impact on eWOM, the study also examines other forms of engagement, such as social media platform engagement (SMPE) and influencer partnership engagement (IPE). Although SMPE also has a positive influence on eWOM, its effect is weaker compared to CLE ($\beta=0.104$, $p<0.05$). This indicates that while social media interactions are important, direct customer engagement remains a more powerful driver of eWOM. In contrast, IPE demonstrates a strong influence on eWOM ($\beta=0.234$, $p<0.001$), highlighting the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies in enhancing brand visibility and trust among customers. However, the study notes that while influencer partnerships can amplify eWOM, they do not replace the foundational role of direct customer engagement.

The findings suggest that QC businesses should prioritize strategies that enhance

customer level engagement, social media platform engagement and influencer partnership engagement to foster eWOM. This could involve creating community, encouraging reviews and personalized interactions. Quick commerce companies can develop platforms or forums where customers can share experiences and feedback. They can actively solicit reviews and testimonials from engaged customers. They can tailor communications based on customer preferences to enhance their sense of involvement with the brand. Customer level engagement is a vital component in driving eWOM within quick commerce environments. By fostering deeper connections with customers through active participation and personalized interactions, brands can leverage eWOM as a powerful tool for enhancing visibility and influencing purchase decisions.
The findings also emphasized the importance of leveraging social media platforms for enhancing eWOM in QC by strategic content creation, encouraging user-generated content and responsive engagement. The QC brands should focus on creating engaging content that resonates with their target audience, encouraging shares and discussions. By incentivizing customers to share their experiences on social media, the QC brands can amplify their reach and credibility. They must actively respond to customer inquiries and feedback on social media to foster a sense of community and encourage further engagement.

Influencer partnerships play a significant role in boosting electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the QC sector, as evidenced by the findings from the exploratory study. The research highlights the effectiveness of influencer partnership engagement (IPE) in enhancing eWOM, with a validated hypothesis showing a strong positive relationship ($\beta=0.234$, $p<0.001$). This indicates that collaborations with influencers significantly contribute to generating eWOM, making them a valuable component of marketing strategies in quick commerce (Kapoor, Sindwani & Goel, 2023).

The lack of a direct correlation between electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and customer loyalty in QC, as indicated by the study's findings ($\beta =0.040$, $p>0.05$), can be attributed to several factors. QC typically involves fast-paced transactions where customers prioritize speed and convenience over brand loyalty. In such scenarios, customers may rely more on immediate needs and less on brand reputation or loyalty, which can diminish the impact of eWOM (Mukhopadhyay, 2022).

The significant impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on purchase decisions in QC carries several important implications for businesses operating in this sector. Given the findings from the exploratory study, where eWOM was shown to significantly influence purchase decisions ($\beta=0.268$, $p<0.001$), companies can leverage this insight to enhance their marketing strategies effectively. Businesses should integrate eWOM into their marketing strategies, recognizing it as a powerful tool for influencing customer behavior. This could involve encouraging satisfied customers to share their experiences online or creating campaigns that incentivize sharing. By focusing on customer engagement, leveraging social media platforms, collaborating with influencers, and building trust through authentic communication, companies can effectively harness the power of eWOM to drive sales and foster customer loyalty in a competitive landscape.

7. Theoretical Implications

The research on the impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the context of quick commerce contributes significantly to existing theoretical frameworks, particularly the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. This model posits that external stimuli, such as eWOM, influences internal psychological states, leading to behavioral responses like purchase decisions. By applying the SOR framework, this study elucidates how different dimensions of eWOM—such as customer level engagement (CLE), social media platform engagement (SMPE), and influencer partnership engagement (IPE)—affect customer attitudes towards QC brands like Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart.

The findings suggest that positive eWOM enhances brand perception and encourages customer loyalty, while negative eWOM can deter potential customers. This dual nature of eWOM underscores the importance of managing online reputations effectively. Additionally, the research highlights gaps in current literature regarding quick commerce

specifically, suggesting that traditional e-commerce theories may not fully capture the unique dynamics at play in this rapidly evolving sector. The exploration of how eWOM operates differently in quick commerce compared to broader e-commerce settings expands the theoretical understanding of customer behavior in digital marketplaces.
Moreover, this study identifies critical antecedents of eWOM engagement that can inform future research directions. For instance, it suggests that factors such as perceived service quality and customer satisfaction significantly impact the likelihood of customers sharing their experiences online. This insight aligns with previous studies indicating that engaged customers are more likely to generate positive eWOM, thus reinforcing the need for businesses to foster strong relationships with their customers.

8. Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, this research provides actionable insights for quick commerce platforms seeking to leverage eWOM as a marketing strategy. Given the competitive landscape characterized by rapid delivery services, companies must prioritize customer engagement initiatives that encourage satisfied customers to share their experiences online. Strategies may include incentivizing reviews, enhancing customer service interactions, and actively engaging with customers on social media platforms (Kushwaha, Singh, Varghese & Singh, 2020).

Furthermore, the study indicates that brands should focus on building partnerships with influencers who can amplify positive eWOM. Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for reaching broader audiences and enhancing brand credibility. By collaborating with trusted figures within relevant communities, QC companies can effectively harness eWOM to drive customer loyalty and influence purchasing decisions.

Additionally, businesses should invest in monitoring and managing their online reputations proactively. Understanding the factors that contribute to both positive and negative eWOM can help companies develop strategies to mitigate risks associated with unfavorable reviews while amplifying positive feedback. This includes implementing robust customer feedback mechanisms and responding promptly to customer concerns (Baber, Baber, Narula & Kaurav, 2024).

The implications extend beyond individual companies; they also suggest a need for industry-wide standards regarding transparency and authenticity in eWOM practices. As customers become increasingly discerning about online information, establishing trust through genuine engagement will be crucial for sustaining growth in the quick commerce sector.

This exploratory study not only fills a significant gap in the literature regarding eWOM's role in QC but also provides practical strategies for businesses aiming to enhance customer loyalty and improve purchase decisions through effective management of electronic word-of-mouth marketing. By recognizing the pivotal role of eWOM in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors, QC platforms can better navigate the complexities of modern digital marketing landscapes.

9. Conclusion

The research conducted on the role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in influencing customer loyalty and purchase decisions within the QC sector has yielded significant insights, contributing to both theoretical frameworks and practical applications. As QC platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart continue to evolve in a competitive marketplace, understanding the dynamics of eWOM becomes increasingly crucial.

This study has confirmed that eWOM serves as a vital marketing tool that can significantly impact customer behavior. The findings align with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, which illustrates how external stimuli—such as eWOM—affect internal psychological states and lead to observable behavioral responses. The research highlights that positive eWOM enhances brand perception, fosters customer loyalty, and ultimately influences purchasing decisions. Conversely, negative eWOM can deter potential customers, underscoring the dual nature of online reviews & recommendations.

Moreover, the study identifies key dimensions of eWOM engagement, including customer level engagement (CLE), social media platform

engagement (SMPE), and influencer partnership engagement (IPE). Each of these dimensions plays a critical role in shaping customer attitudes toward quick commerce brands. For instance, high levels of CLE are associated with increased likelihood of customers sharing positive experiences online, thereby amplifying favorable eWOM. Similarly, effective engagement on social media platforms can enhance visibility and credibility for brands, while partnerships with influencers can extend the reach of positive messaging.

The implications for QC companies are profound. To leverage eWOM effectively, these platforms must prioritize strategies that encourage satisfied customers to share their experiences. This could involve incentivizing reviews or actively engaging with customers through social media interactions. Furthermore, the research suggests that brands should consider forming strategic partnerships with influencers who resonate with their target audience. Such collaborations can amplify positive eWOM and enhance brand credibility in a market where trust is paramount.

10. Limitation and Direction for Future Studies

The research on the influence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in quick commerce presents valuable insights; however, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations that could affect the applicability and generalizability of the findings. One of the primary limitations of this study is the exploratory nature of this research that may lead to methodological constraints. Future studies could benefit from a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative insights with quantitative data to strengthen findings.

The rapidly evolving nature of QC presents another limitation. Customer behaviors and perceptions can change swiftly due to market dynamics, technological advancements, or shifts in societal norms. The data collected at one point in time may not accurately reflect ongoing trends or future developments in eWOM's influence on customer loyalty and purchase decisions. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to track changes over time and assess the sustainability of eWOM effects.

The study may not have fully accounted for external factors that influence customer behavior beyond eWOM, such as economic conditions, marketing campaigns, or competitive actions from other companies. These factors can significantly impact customer loyalty and purchasing decisions but may not be directly related to eWOM efforts. Future research should consider these variables to better isolate the effects of eWOM from other influences.

As technology continues to evolve, future studies should investigate how advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and chatbots influence eWOM dynamics in quick commerce. Exploring how these technologies can enhance customer engagement and facilitate positive eWOM sharing will be crucial for staying competitive in the market.

While this research provides valuable insights into the role of eWOM in QC, addressing these limitations will be essential for enhancing the rigor and applicability of future studies. By acknowledging these constraints, researchers can better understand the complexities surrounding eWOM and its influence on customer loyalty and purchase decisions in an ever-evolving marketplace.

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