The influence of message persuasiveness on the eWOM trustworthiness of the purchase behavior of search products

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Abstract
Purpose: Over the time, consumption of online social platforms in order to share word of mouth about clothing has increased. However, the mechanism by which message persuasiveness influenced through eWOM on purchase of clothing has yet to be fully understood. This study develops a research framework that focuses on the influence of message persuasiveness on the eWOM trustworthiness of the search products' purchase behavior.
Design/Methodology/Approach: This study collected data from a sample of 258 respondents using online questionnaires. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to investigate the influence.
Findings: The results show the significant positive influence of Message Persuasiveness (MP) on the eWOM Trustworthiness (ETW) and the eWOM Trustworthiness on the intentions to buy Search products (SP). The study confirms that eWOM Trustworthiness mediates the relationship between Message Persuasiveness and intentions to buy Search products.
Implications/Originality/Value: This empirical study can enable managers to better understand the effects of eWOM Trustworthiness on intentions to buy Search products. Our results should encourage marketers to work with SNSs to develop viral marketing campaigns, encouraging customers to spread useful and credible eWOM trustworthiness to improve purchase intentions.
Keywords
Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Trustworthiness, Purchase Behavior, Search Products.

1. Introduction

The increased number of consumers majorly uses online tools in order to share their opinions, experiences and thoughts regarding the product or services consumed by them. Word of mouth is referred to as a way of marketing through which the consumers spread the word with the help of their daily dialogues by talking about the company's product and services. It is generally a way of free advertisement activated from the customer experiences. Moreover, it can be accorded that due to the growth of web technology in terms of use by the general populace, it has served its purpose of introducing changes from commerce to the notion of E-commerce, respectively. Furthermore, the notion of web technology has initiated a comprehensive platform to fulfil the purpose of accommodating social network mediums to serve the purpose of transforming the traditional mode of relaying information i.e., word of mouth towards electronic word of mouth (Necula et al., 2018). To provide clarity on the preceding mentioned point, it can be duly stated that with the advent of technology, the notion of providing reviews upfront has been provided a forum in terms of social media where consumers can share their experience with regards to the products as well as the services of the companies (Oztemel, and Gursev, 2020). Moreover; the consumers are also rendered with the opportunity to share their respective shopping experience through online

mediums, along with the capability that is guaranteed to the consumers to purchase more products from the companies based on the electronic word of mouth which serves the purpose of the respective companies as well; in terms of increasing their consumer base respectively.

The following study demonstrates the purchase intention by determining the effect of trust and e-WOM. it is likely to determine the factors of E-WOM trustworthiness over the purchasing behavior. Other than that, it analyzes the issues faced by customers in online shopping along with assessing the impacts of volume, valance and ratings on the social media communication. Although, it provides the conceptual framework which will determine the dependent and independent variable affecting the research topic. It further highlights the theoretical framework in order to validate the research.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)
Electronic word of mouth communication is referred to as a positive and negative statement expressed by potential, actual and former customers with regards to product or company spreading through different mediums. Electronic word of mouth is a word- of- mouth system which is present within the virtual space where the messages or communication are sent or received with the help of consumer experience via chatting or online boards. This type of communication plays a significant role in impacting the consumers in a positive or negative manner. It has been observed that 70% of the population owns a mobile phone where Malaysia is one of those countries that has driven the wave of telecommunication evolution. This development of modern technology has permitted the Internet to compact the knowledge to the world on their fingertips.

The concept of electronic word of mouth is strongly associated with the application of user generated content (UGC) in the digital advertising "mix". However, there are two types of word of mouth such as the traditional word of mouth and the electronic word of mouth. Traditional word of mouth is the that we spoke where the message disappears immediately after it is spoken whereas, the electronic word of mouth is the one where the message remains for the longer period of time which majorly entails blogs, social media posts or online reviews.

Today's marketplace has a heavy impact on Internet which has influenced the minds of the consumers and has changed the perspective of consumers in order to make their decisions regarding the purchases. This determines that this new trend of electronic word of mouth has played a critical role on consumer preferences and the behavioral intentions. It illustrates that eWOM could have higher credibility, empathy and relevance more than the marketer-created sources of information. Although, it demonstrates that EWOM has a powerful impact over the customers, where there are numerous factors which enhances the influence.

2.2 Volume of eWOM (EVOL)
It determines that number of E-WOM messages creates the information, the gathered information is than observed on the basis of which the decisions are made. Thus, it determines that the volume of E-WOM communications have a positive impact on buying intention. Following on the preceding mentioned statement, it can be accorded with further elaboration that in the event of a purchase of a product that is accorded by a respective consumer, the level of suspicion raises among the consumers with regards to the quality of

the product respectively (Baze et al., 2020). In this scenario, it can be effectively mentioned that the quantity of information accords its due role in leveraging the confidence of the consumer base which is realized by an effective electronic word of mouth.

Furthermore, it can be stated that if the quantity of information is increased manifold in terms of providing reviews to the consumer base with regards to the product, it raises the chances of the product to be purchased by the consumer substantially as well as it has also been noted that the abundance of information provided by the electric word of mouth accords a pivotal role in the purchasing decision making process of the consumer base respectively. In light of the aforementioned point, it can be duly noted that the quantity of information that is present on the online mediums is considered directly proportional to the increased purchasing decisions of the consumer base, respectively (Zangeneh et al., 2014).

H1: There is a significant positive influence of Volume of eWOM (EVOL) on the Message Persuasiveness (MP)

2.3   Valance of eWOM (EVAL)
The E-WOM communication vary among the valence it is sometimes positive or it could be negative. It illustrates that the positive evaluations are mostly to possess a pleasant, vivid and romanticised explanation regarding the products and services. In contrast to it, negative eWOM communication usually incorporates complaints, unpleasant and unauthorized descriptions which, therefore, could generate a negative impact on the purchasing intention of consumers (Zangeneh et al., 2014). Thus, reviews are positive and negative influence over the purchasing intention.

H2: There is a significant positive influence of Valance of eWOM (EVAL) on the Message Persuasiveness (MP)

2.4   Rating of Product (RATP)
Bao (2019) states that past ratings and conversations impact future EWOM opinions. Persistence and observability mean that the existing EWOM will have an effect on future EWOM opinions. It not only affects the consumer purchase behaviour but also the outcome of consumer purchases. Thus, the way an opinion is written, and the language used, and other properties used will become salient Hu (2018). Salient is the term that is used to assign a positive or negative rating to a product or service.

Ratings affects the online activities of any king greatly, both positively and negatively. It is human nature, that when a person hears or see something, they require validation to make sure that they are not doing something that could prove to be costly in the future. It has been discovered that whenever a person sees something, they like which is being communicated via the use of social media communication platforms, they always try to validate the information by taking a look at the reviews that are available in the internet (Nekmat, 2020). By looking at the reviews, a person can make up their mind on what they want to buy. The success of any type pf communication done through social media must also have positive reviews, otherwise the people would not be motivated by it.

H3: There is a significant positive influence of Rating of Product (RATP) on the Message Persuasiveness (MP)

2.5   Message Persuasiveness (MP)

It determines that E-WOM refers to online messages for which if the individual found the information credible, they would have more confidence in the adaptation of eWOM messages and used it for the purpose of decision making (Stuart, et al., 2014). Unlike, conventional WOM, messages are conveyed that have numerous accessibility and well-organized sources of knowledge for customers.

A persuasive message is a central message which intrigues, notifies, persuades of calls to action. Persuasive messages deliberately have the elements of ethos, credibility, pathos, or passion and enthusiasm along with various logos, logic and reason. The persuasive message is likely to ensure the credibility or else the message will be dismissed. It is required for the persuasive message to majorly focus on emotions that can generate awareness of the audiences and could grab their attention. WOM impacts on the persuasion by determining message source accessibility, along with message source similarity (Purcarea et al., 2013). Although, the message is based on the four dimensions including hedonic value, symbol value, interest and perceived risk. Considering these four dimensions helps in providing precise and attractive messages. It has been recognized that consumers make progressive efforts for the purchase decision. However, WOM's effect on purchasing decisions is greater than the loss -risk situation.

H4: There is a significant positive influence of Message Persuasiveness (MP) on the eWOM Trustworthiness (ETW)

2.6   eWOM Trustworthiness (ETW)

Trust is one of the major yet the most significant aspect in eWOM, as eWOM is mainly based on trust. Trust in messages refers towards the individual's perception where the knowledge provided in the message could be trusted (Ismagilova et al., 2019). There is an association among the trust in message and purchase intention where it denotes that the trust in message illustrates a positive effect on the consumers intention to buy the goods.

The second-degree credibility dimension of E-WOM is known as Trustworthiness which is denoted as to the message source's alleged motivation for providing actual and truthful information. Individuals who seek for opinions are usually more prepared towards assessing source trustworthiness. It determines that according to numerous studies it has been identified that the trust plays a vital role in the exchange of information and incorporation of expertise (Fanoberova and Kuczkowska, 2016). Trustworthiness occurs when a person depends upon another person's opinion on which they rely on. To evaluate the legitimacy of EWOM, customers should acquire from their own experiences and participation. Trust is the most primary factor that needs to be catered and taken under consideration where, trust allows the individual to describe and assess their decisions in order to provide more valuable information.

H5: There is a significant positive influence of on the eWOM Trustworthiness (ETW) on the intentions to buy Search products (SP)

2.7   Search products (SP)

All goods/services can be categorised on a scale ranging from simple to difficult to evaluate; their place on the scale is determined by the degree of information asymmetry labels them as goods/services search, experience, or credence (Darby & Karni 1973; Nelson 1970, 1974).

Clothing and furniture, for example, have a high number of quest attributes, making them easy to test prior to purchase (Zeithaml et al., 2000). Holidays, telecommunications, and restaurants, for example, depend on intangible qualities of experience since their intangible nature prohibits customers from assessing their content while purchasing and consuming them (Brush & Artz 1999; Klein 1998). Finally, credence products and services include legal assistance, financial savings, and education, to name a few benefits. (Lovelock, 2001).

H6: eWOM Trustworthiness (ETW) mediates the relationship between Message Persuasiveness (MP) and the intentions to buy Search products (SP)
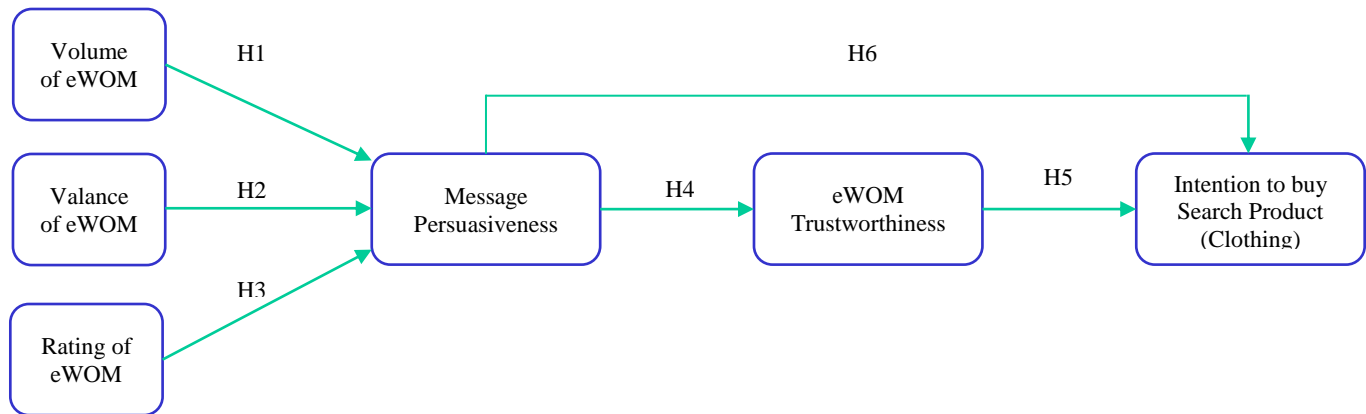
3. Methodology
3.1 Research Setting and Collection of Data
A survey method through a close-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from the customers who use social media platform preferably Facebook to buy clothing online. Hence, convenience sampling was applied. 258 sample size is sufficient, calculated through AMOS software with the settings of 0.15 for effect size, 0.05 for error Type I, and 80% power. However, considering the low response rate due to COVID'19 pandemic situation, 400 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents where only 276 were returned. The eighteen questionnaires were omitted from the final analysis due to incomplete and missing data.

3.2 Measures
The data was collected using a serve instrument and the scales were adapted from the past studies. The items used in the instrument to measure the constructs of this study is adopted from previous literature. A 5-point Likert scale was developed to collect data for all items where "5" denotes the strongly agree, and "1" represents the strongly disagree. The survey instrument was developed using Google Docs, and the link was generated and sent to respondents on there social media accounts as their personal message.

3.3 Statistical Tool for Data Analysis
The study used SPSS and Amos for data analysis. After collecting their responses the data was cleaned for further analysis. Initially the descriptive statistics were run on SPSS. After that confirmatory factor analysis was performed on Amos. Confirmatory factor analysis was used for reliability and validity tests. A second order measurement model was developed for this purpose finished to test the hypothesis, structural equation modelling was used. the model fitness indices were calculated to ensure a good model fitness.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The study was conducted using survey technique and total of 400 data collection instruments were distributed amongst general consumers using convenient sampling. Total 276 questionnaires were received reflecting the response rate 69%. All the questioners were entered in SPSS for data analysis. The data was observed for missing values and it was found that a number of respondents did not complete the questionnaires fully. Therefore all those responses word delete it where more than 50% of the questionnaire was not completed. In this way 18 questioners were discarded from the further analysis. In this way the actual response rate was 64.5%.

The data was collected from the people of different demographic background to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. Moreover, a widespread sample may be suitable for generalisation of the study. The study collected about a number demographic variables like age, gender, education qualification, and income. The data reveals that male 142 (55%), while 116 (45 %) females. Majority of the sample lies between age 21 to 25 with the 55% 142, whereas 86 (33.3 %) belong the age groups between 26-30 years, 30 (11.6 %) were above 40 years old. The data also revealed that 134 (51.9% %) respondents hold master degree, 79 (30.6 %) bachelor degree and remaining 45 (17.4%) had education qualification below bachelor degree.

To investigate the influence of messages persuasiveness and eWOM trustworthiness in developing the intentions to buy search products (clothing), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. The table 1 exhibits the correlation between the major constructs and the reliability statistics.

According to Schumacker and Lomex (2010) second order constructs is different from the lower order latent factors. To deal with this a repetitive process is advised by Schumacker and Lomex (2010). The study on hand uses message persuasiveness as 2nd order constructs. This study uses total 6 latent factors and the total number of the observed variables are 30. It is also to be noted that Message Persuasiveness is a second order latent factor while the remaining are the first order latent variable. Therefore, to run the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFI), initially a first order measurement model was run, followed by second order measurement model. The data shows a good fita dn the values are as follows: CFI =.89, GFI = .91, PCLOSE = .56, RMESEA = 0.071, NFI = .87, TLI = .84, x^2 = 270.73, AGFI = .88, CAMIN/DF = 2.92

Table 1:Correlation Analysis between the Variables and Reliability statistics

		1	2	3	4	5
1	Vol of eWOM	(0.82)				
2	Valence of eWOM	0.45**	(0.71)			
3	Rating of eWOM	0.37**	0.48**	(0.81)		
4	eWOM Trustworthiness	0.46**	0.41**	0.37**	(0.76)	
5	Intentions to buy	0.36**	0.45**	0.39*	0.44**	(0.84)

N=258
.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Reliabilities (Chronbach's α) given in bold along the diagonal

Structural model
After achieving the fitness of measurement model and performing CFA the study move to structural model. The structure model is used to test the hypothesis the influence of independent variable is on the dependent variables. For the analysis of hypothetical model, all construct in the structural model are used further testing and evaluation of the final model. As it has been discussed earlier that message persuasiveness our second order latent factor, while other variables our first order latent factors. Therefore structural model is also tested on 2nd order and 1st order latent factors with their 30 observe variables.

Present study employed nine fitness indices to evaluate the model. The values are as follows: CMIN/DF = 4.64, AGFI = 0.89, GFI =0.98, CFI = 0.86, NFI = 0.92RMSEA = 0.05, , TFI = 0.93, PCLOSE = 0.06 and IFI = 0.91. All values are within their acceptable range of fitness so the model is considered as good.

The table 2 exhibits the standardised parameters estimates. For the variables used in the hypothesised model. This table depicts only the direct relationship between the variables. As the data shows that there is a significant positive influence of volume of eWOM on the message persuasiveness. Therefore it can be inferred that hypothesis 1 cannot be rejected. Similarly the data also shows that valence has significant positive influence on message persuasiveness. Moreover rating also positively influence message persuasiveness. Hence hypothesis two and three cannot be rejected.

the table also exhibits that message persuasiveness which is a latent variable positively influences the eWOM Trustworthiness. Moreover eWOM Trustworthiness positively influences intentions to buy search products (clothing in our case). Hence the hypotheses four and five stand true as well.

Table 2: The standardized parameter estimates

	β	SE	p-Value
MP ← VOL	0.45	0.014	0.001
MP ← VAL	0.471	0.015	0.001
MP ← RATING	0.113	0.027	0.001
ETW ← MP	0.721	0.019	0.001
SP ← ETW	0.186	0.026	0.001

Mediation Analysis
The mediating variables create a mechanism through which independent variable influences the dependent variable. The hypothesis #6 of this study was to test the mediating effect of eWOM Trustworthiness (eWOM) on the relationship between Message persuasiveness (MP) and purchase intentions (PI). To test this effect bootstrapping was used because this strategy help creating sampling distribution to estimate standard errors and create confidence intervals (Cheung & Lau, 2008). Two major the direct and indirect effect of the proposed model Bollen & Stine Bootstraps method was used with *N*=3000 and 95% Bias Corrected Confidence Interval. The Mediation model is given in the table 3.

The goodness of fit measure show a reasonable fit. The values ate shown as follows: CFI =.87, GFI = .94, PCLOSE = .97, RMESEA = 0.68, NFI = .95, TLI = .97, x^2 = 269.73, DF = 143, CAMIN = 1.88

Table 3 : Regression Analysis Mediation

Path	Total effect (TE)	P value of TE	Direct effect (DE)	P value of DE	Indirect effect (IE)	P value of IE	Results
MP→ETW→SP	0.747	0.01	0.437	0.01	0.29	0.01	Partial Mediation

The table 3 exhibits the mediation analysis in the model. According to, the model it was hypothesised that eWOM Trustworthiness mediates the relationship between Message persuasiveness (MP) and Purchase intentions. The table provides the total effect (which includes direct and mediation effect), Direct effect of trustworthiness of eWOM (eWOM on PI), and indirect effect (influence of Message persuasiveness (MP) on PI through trustworthiness of eWOM). The table exhibits that attitude have partial mediating influence on the relationship between MP and PI.

Standardized total effect of trustworthiness of MP on Purchase Intention was $B=.747$ ($p<.001$) with standardized direct effect $B=.437$($p<.001$) and indirect effect $B=.29$ ($p<.001$). As direct effect was insignificant and indirect effect was significant so it is concluded that partial mediation is present here.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was aimed to investigate the influence of electronic word of mouth on the purchase intentions of search products. The data overall has shown that eWOM significantly influences the purchase intentions of consumers. For this purpose structural equation modelling was used to test the hypothesis. To test the direct hypothesis regression weights or beta values what are used in addition to standard error and p-values. The mediating relationship was tested using the significance of direct and indirect effect through bootstrapping sampling strategy.

The data showed that persuasiveness of message is significantly influenced by volume, Valance and ratings of electronic word of mouth. The results are in line with the past studies (see e.eg Baze et al., 2020; Hu, 2018; Nekmat, 2020; Zangeneh et al., 2014). Moreover the data has also shown that message persuasiveness has a positive and significant influence on eWOM trustworthiness. The results obtained with the help of the data collected for this study are in line with the past studies. For example, Purcarea et al., (2013) have argued that the source of message plays a s vital role in eWOM trustworthiness. The data further exhibits that eWOM trustworthiness has a significant positive influence on purchase intentions off consumers while buying the search products in our case clothing. These results also confirm the results of past studies, for example, Ladhari and Michaud (2015) who studied eWOM effects on hotel booking intentions, attitudes, trust, and website perceptions. Their study was about facebook comments and reviews for the choice of a hotel, booking intentions and trust. They surveyed on 800 university students and results confirmed all the hypotheses. While comparing direct and indirect effect of mediating relationship it was found that eWOM trustworthiness partially mediates the relationship between message persuasiveness and purchase intentions.

The study has provided us with an interesting insights about the role of eWOM in consumer behaviour specifically with reference to the purchase intentions. Though the use of internet in Pakistan is still in early stage, by the year 2018 only 15.10% population uses internet, as

compared to India where 30.4% population is internet user (CIA Factbook, 2021). Besides underdeveloped financial structure for online payments the electronic commerce is growing (Anjum & Chai, 2020). A number of social media platforms, mobile apps and websites are used for e-purchasing. In this context, the results of the study suggest that e-WOM, like other countries, in the Pakistani context, influences the consumer behaviour while shopping online. Therefore, the social media marketers may use the power of electronic word mouth in their marketing strategies.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The sample used in this work was a small proportion of population, which is an online buying group. A more diverse sample of SNS would help generalize the results. Secondly, a larger sample size would be necessary to provide more accurate information regarding the research model. Third, since this study examined clothing as a research product, future research could explore other search product categories, this would further enable us to analyse whether there is any difference on the eWOM Trustworthiness (ETW) among different commodities.

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