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AN INVESTIGATION OF INDIAN CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTIONS USING ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH

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Abstract
Numerous studies have shown that e-WOM and other private information sources have more influence than conventional advertising. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which is regarded as one of the most convincing informal media among consumers, business organizations, and the general public, has expanded with the growth and widespread usage of the Internet. This study aims to evaluate the impact of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on Indian consumers' brand perceptions and online purchase intentions.

Design, methodology, and approach: A non-probability convenience sampling approach was used to collect consumer data for this study. The results of this study show that e-WOM enhances brand perception and purchase intention.

Conclusions: The study's conclusions may be useful to future research in understanding the importance of e-WOM in the context of Indian consumers. This study has a lot to teach researchers who are interested in Indian consumers' internet shopping habits and brand impression. A better

comprehension of the function that e-WOM performs in e-commerce and online purchases can be helpful to marketing professionals and decision-makers alike. The government can take the necessary steps to guarantee that e-WOM is accessible on various online platforms.

Research flaws/Impacts: The absence of a particular product category is one of the study's limitations. No specific product category was taken into account to maximize the study's applicability. Future studies will be able to make a more targeted conclusion by taking into account a certain product category (like electrical gadgets). The investigation's lack of a clearly defined platform is another issue. Numerous internet platforms, including blogs, social media websites, and e-commerce websites, provide access to e-WOM.
Online shopping, e-WOM, e-commerce, and consumer behavior are some related terms.

Introduction:
Numerous online platforms have emerged as a result of the growth and development of Web 2.0 and are today a natural route for the exchange of user opinions and experiences. One of the online platforms is e-WOM, or electronic word of mouth. On a variety of social media platforms, including blogs, product review websites, shopping websites, discussion forums, and more, customer reviews are seen as a type of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Yeap, Ignatius, & Ramayah, 2014). According to Nielsen (2015), e-WOM communication is presently the best advertising tactic.

This has led to it developing into a vital loop that has a significant impact on a number of marketing outcomes, including buy intention, value co-creation, brand equity dimensions, consumer decision-making process, and online purchase intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Shan, 2016; and Chakraborty & Bhat, 2017).

According to Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury (2009), e-WOM may also aid in the development of a positive brand image for a company, its goods, or its services. Because perceived risk is reduced and perceived consumer value is raised, brands benefit as a result (Wang & Tsai, 2014). Brand equity is significantly influenced by brand image, which influences consumer behavior while making purchases as well (Rahman et al. 2020; Liu, Zhang, & Qin 2016). Brand image is taken into consideration when creating a company's marketing strategy. The foundation of the online market is the sale of physical items to consumers or end users via digital channels. More and more people are doing business online every day (Uddin & Sultana, 2015).

Online shoppers are increasingly using electronic word of mouth, or e-WOM, to assess and choose products. According to Charlton (2015) and Floyd et al. (2014), 61% of online customers worldwide favor electronic word of mouth (eWOM) when making a purchasing decision. According to Marketingbuzzar (2015), eWOM influences 20–50% of Indian internet sales, making it a significant factor in consumers' decisions to make an online purchase. Before initiating any

eWOM initiatives to engage those clients, marketers should select the proper client segment and assess online behavior.

Cheung and Thadani (2012) examined the effects of different eWOM characteristics on consumer behavior, including valence (the type of online review), volume (the number of reviews), review content, and digital platform. The dynamics of the eWOM communication process are evolving in accordance with new eWOM characteristics, which has an effect on online purchasing behavior (Erkan and Evans 2016).

An important component of internet behavior is the desire to buy. However, more individuals are shopping online as digital technologies advance.

A Review of the Available Literature

"Electronic word of mouth," or "e-WOM," describes online reviews of a product or business, both favorable and unfavorable (Xue & Zhou, 2010). Most of individuals who participated and voiced their ideas did so behind pseudonyms (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Shan, 2016). You can research this phenomenon online. Modern consumers can assess other people's opinions about goods and services from anywhere in the world because to the extensive use of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Makrides et al., 2020). The significance of understanding e-WOM and customers for marketers has been shown through research in this area. Market-level analysis and individual-level analysis were the two primary categories into which Cheung & Thadani (2012) divided e-WOM. A market-level study looks at how e-WOM impacts organizational outcomes like product sales, whereas an individual-level study looks at how e-WOM influences various aspects of consumer behavior like purchase intention. e-WOM has recently focused its research and practice on the subject of strategic relevance (Wilson et al., 2017).

The essential distinction between e-WOM and conventional word-of-mouth (WOM) can be found in many different places. Coverage is one of the key distinctions between eWOM's scope and speed (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The eWOM spreads quickly online and eventually reaches millions of individuals due to how simple it is to purchase. Although the initial e-WOM format was merely text-based, new e-WOM forms gradually started to arise, allowing users to submit evaluations that were both picture- and video-based (Lin, Lu, & Wu, 2012). Therefore, it is clear that e-WOM has been applied in a number of investigations. However, the majority of these studies concentrated on how the e-WOM effect affected e-WOM adoption, attitude, buy intention, and buy. Only a few studies have examined e-WOM and online purchasing intent. There hasn't been any investigation on how e-WOM influences Indian consumers' propensity for online shopping and perceptions of brands.

According to Chen, Hsu, and Lin (2010), online buy intention is the desire to make a purchase that is transmitted over a network of linked websites. Since the theory of reasoned action (TRA) views

intention as a predictor of activity (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980), it is conceivable to forecast consumer online buying behavior using the TRA account of the theory of online purchase intention.

Marketers who are interested in consumer purchasing patterns must be aware of the elements that influence customers' purchase intentions. In the past, research into additional elements that affect customers' purchase decisions has been given priority. The same is true for goals involving internet shopping. Trust is an important aspect in determining whether or not someone performs an online transaction because they are riskier and less certain than transactions conducted in a typical brick and mortar firm (Ariffin, Mohan, and Goh, 2018). This assertion received additional support from Nathan et al.'s (2019) study of young Malaysian customers, which showed a favorable association between online trust and the desire to make a purchase. Another topic that frequently comes up when assessing potential online purchases is technology. Technology and trust perspectives have a considerable impact on online purchasing intention, according to a new study by Ye et al. (2019).

Online Purchase Intention and e-WOM: Prior research has demonstrated that customer trust levels have a significant impact on their intentions to make online purchases. See-to & Ho (2014) claim that eWOM is a technique for increasing consumer trust in a brand and its goods. Through the usage of e-WOM, individuals share their thoughts and life experiences, serving as a resource for potential customers. A prospective customer may build some trust in the evaluated firm or product depending on the type of information (positive or negative e-WOM) provided by past customers regarding the product or company (Tran and Strutton, 2020). Later, this trust will have an impact on the potential customer's decision to make an online purchase.

The likelihood of completing an online purchase and the strength of the case in online reviews were found to be positively correlated by Lin et al. (2011). Erkan & Evans (2016) came to the same results when they discovered that e-WOM found on shopping websites had a bigger influence on online purchase intention than e-WOM found on social networking sites. Hsu, Lin, and Chiang (2013) made the case that blog readers' intentions to shop online were significantly influenced by online recommendations from bloggers. According to See-to & Ho (2014), e-WOM directly affects customers' intentions to make online purchases. Following these discussions, the following hypothesis was made:

"Electronic Word of Mouth" H1: Considerably Influences Intention to Make an Online Purchase.

Brand Image: Whether a consumer has a favorable perception of a brand depends on their collection of brand associations, claims Keller (1993). Brand affiliation is one of the five components of brand equity listed by Aaker (1991). Then, Keller (1993) created the customer-

based brand equity (CBBE) dimensions, which include the dimensions of brand awareness and brand image.

According to Chakraborty and Bhat (2017), Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991) both defined brand association and brand image in the same ways. When attempting to create a brand association, prior knowledge or experience may be beneficial. Brand experience can be direct or indirect, as we are all too aware. Additionally, rather than past consumption of the good or service, additional sources including advertising, word-of-mouth, and online product reviews count as indirect experience (Gensler et al. 2015). Consumer brand experiences, whether positive or negative, may influence their brand connections, which in turn influence brand perceptions (Rahman et al., 2018).

Brand Image & e-WOM- Online communication and information exchange across various platforms can have a big impact on consumers' attitudes since individuals use these channels to learn more about a thing (or thing(s)) (Jansen et al. 2009). Consumers utilize online product reviews, also known as e-WOM, to learn more about a product and to help them decide whether or not to buy it (Hu et al. 2008). e-WOM, often known as electronic word of mouth, refers to a range of things. According to Gensler et al. (2015), online product reviews contribute to the development of a positive brand image. Reliable online reviews, according to Chakraborty & Bhat (2017), can encourage the development of positive brand associations. For a brand to establish a solid reputation, positive brand relationships are required. Following these discussions, the following hypothesis was made:

Digital word-of-mouth H2 has a big impact on brand perception.

Online Purchase Intentions & Brand Image: A person's inclination to use a brand's products or services online might be increased by feeling positive about it. This hypothesis has been backed by a number of research, including the finding by Ansari and Hashim (2018) that brand image may have a direct impact on consumers' purchasing intentions. The foundation of a brand's identity is brand association. For instance, a 2012 study by Jalilvand & Samiei on Iran's automobile sector discovered that brand image may have a big impact on purchasers' intentions to buy cars. In 2016, Liu et al. performed research on customers' intentions towards cosmetics online purchases. They discovered that brand perception positively affects both business and product online purchasing intentions. According to research by Chattaraman et al. (2012) on consumers' intentions to buy clothing online, a positive appraisal of the product brand can aid in lowering risk perceptions, which can then affect customers' intentions to do so. After having these discussions, the following theory was created:

A brand image is "H3- Has a Significant Impact on Online Purchase Intention".

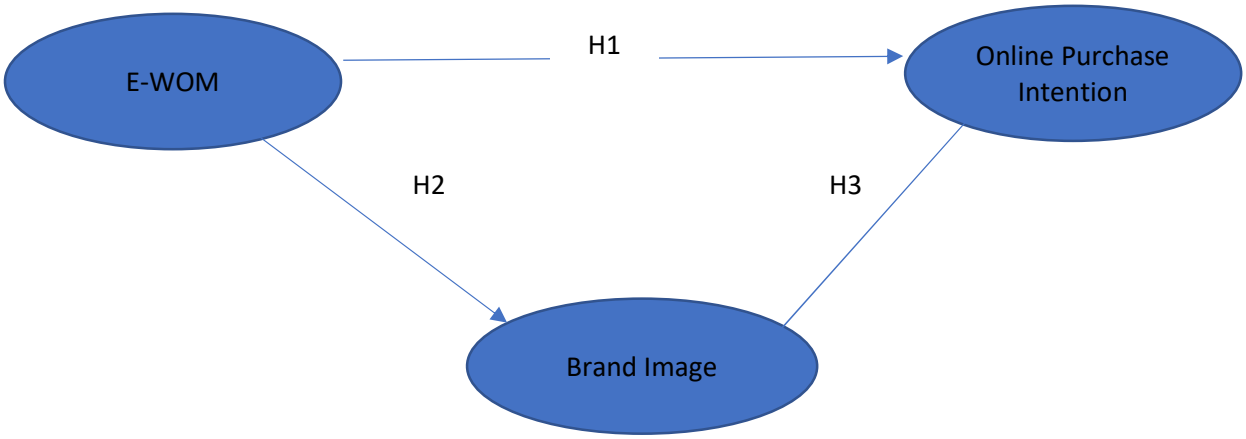

Figure: 1- Conceptual Framework

***Source**: Adapted from Jalilvand & Samiei (2012)

Sampling Technique: This study employed purposeful (convincing) sampling in order to include social network users with prior experience making purchases online. One advantage of purposeful nonprobability sampling is that it allows researchers to focus on certain study subjects related to a specific subset of demographic traits (Neuman, 2014). Random sample was not practical for this study, which aimed to investigate how e-WOM affects customers' intents to purchase digital items, since not all Social Networking users make purchases online. Top Indian metropolises, including Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Banglore, were included in the sample selection process.

Data Collection & Procedure: A closed-ended questionnaire with items drawn from previously developed items on the selected construct was used to collect data for this investigation. Online questionnaires generated with "Google forms" were disseminated through social media platforms. Two months were allotted for the administration of the questionnaire (March and April, 2023).

A total of 278 replies were supplied by survey participants. Only 233 replies were retained for additional analysis since the remaining 32 did not meet the respondents' screening requirements (i.e., they indicated that they were unfamiliar with online reviews). This target was chosen at between 100 and 150 samples in accordance with structural equation modeling (SEM) norms.

Hair et al. (2018) advocate a sample size that is five times larger than the total number of indicators. Considering that the study questionnaire had 17 indicators, a sample size of 105 or higher was thought to be ideal. It was therefore reasonable to proceed to the data processing stage with a sample size of 233 respondents.

Measurement: Every item was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Everything was changed from previous studies. Fourteen

items were used to test each of the three variables: e-WOM, brand image, and intention to make an online purchase. Six items drawn from Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) were used to measure e-WOM. Four questions were adapted from Coyle and Thorson (2001) and Moon, Chadee, and Tikoo (2008) to assess online purchase intention. Finally, in order to measure brand image, four items that were adapted from Davies, Golicic, and Marquardt (2009) were used.

Data Analysis: To identify underlying linkages, the route coefficients in this study are evaluated for goodness-of-fit and significance using AMOS (2019) version 24. Tools measuring goodness-of-fit (GFI) (2 (chi-square) test), absolute fit index (root mean square error of approximation, or RMSEA), incremental fit indices (incremental fit index, or IFI), the Tucker-Lewis index, or the comparative fit index, or CFI, were used to determine and explore the relationships between the constructs for this study. Furthermore, reporting associations between endogenous and exogenous constructs is made possible by standard estimation.

Results:

Demographic Profile: Out of the 233 responders, 33.5% were female and 66.5% were male. 63.9% of respondents were between the ages of 19 and 28, indicating that the majority of respondents were young Indian adults. The majority of participants (41.6%) stated that their monthly income was dependant.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20 or Below	5	2.1
21-30	149	63.9
31-40	60	25.8
41-50	10	4.3
51-60	7	3.0
Above 60	2	.9
Gender		
Male	155	66.5
Female	78	33.5
Monthly Income		
Dependent	97	41.6
Below INR 25K	17	7.3
INR 25.1K-INR 50K	41	17.6
INR 50.1K-INR 75K	41	17.6
Above INR 75K	37	15.9

The tests listed above showed connections between e-WOM, brand perception, and consumer purchase intentions. The parameter estimations and complete measurement model fit score are both used in this investigation. The maximum likelihood (ML) technique serves as the foundation for the relationships.

Using Cronbach's alpha, the internal consistency and reliability of this study are evaluated. Each build's internal consistency levels were appropriate, and its alpha values ranged from 0.750 to 0.777, above the lowest criterion of 0.60 (Hair et al., 1998). The convergent validity of the measuring model was demonstrated by the fact that all measuring items consistently indicated load estimations of 0.5 or above at the alpha stage of 0.05 (range from 0.532 to 0.805). Each construct exhibited strong construct reliability, as indicated by estimations ranging from 0.801 to 0.836, which were used to predict convergent validity (Hair et al., 1998).

Construct	Item	Standardized Loading	t-statistic	Mean	St. dev	Cronbach's A
e-WOM CR= .842; AVE= .594	e-WOM1	.549	-	3.927	.891	.777
	e-WOM2	.651	7.234	3.956	0.949	
	e-WOM3	.600	6.906	3.759	1.027	
	e-WOM4	.694	7.519	3.903	0.982	
	e-WOM5	.547	6.478	3.616	1.005	
	e-WOM6	.624	7.066	3.962	0.877	
Brand Image (BI) CR= .842; AVE= .572	BI1	.788	10.180	3.653	0.958	.765
	BI2	.546	7.486	3.624	0.879	
	BI3	.659	8.838	3.724	0.793	
	BI4	.679	-	3.798	0.848	
Purchase Intention (PI) CR= .889; AVE= .568	PI1	.806	-	3.763	0.848	.750
	PI2	.597	9.109	3.898	0.744	
	PI3	.678	10.495	3.665	0.938	
	PI4	.533	8.044	3.821	0.787	

Note: Construct Reliability=CR, Average Variance Extracted =AVE, Electronic word of mouth =e-WOM, Brand Image=BI, Purchase Intention=PI

Additionally, convergent validity was ensured because the average variance extracted (AVE) from all three constructs exceeded the minimum requirement of 0.5 (ranging from 0.567 to 0.592) (Hair et al., 1998). The following table displays the construct-specific relationships. These measurement results are acceptable overall. These also imply that moving forward with the structural model evaluation is appropriate.

									e-W	e-W	e-W	e-W	e-W	e-W
	PI4	PI3	PI2	PI1	BI1	BI2	BI3	BI4	O	O	O	OM	OM	OM
									M6	M5	M4	3	2	1
PI4	1													
	0													
PI3	0.4	1												
	8	0												
PI2	0.35	0.401	1											
	4		0											
PI1	0.39	0.567	0.44	1										
	3		9	0										
BI1	0.37	0.436	0.46	0.56	1									
	0		6	7	0									
BI2	0.18	0.23	0.27	0.41	0.45	1								
	7		0	0	9	0								
BI3	0.3	0.351	0.31	0.43	0.51	0.44	1							
	3		9	6	3	2	0							
BI4	0.34	0.488	0.35	0.48	0.5	0.32	0.45	1						
	0		6	9	5	9	0	0						
eWO	0.31	0.3	0.34	0.43	0.34	0.24	0.31	0.36	1					
M6	9		1	2	7	4	7	6	0					
eWO	0.31	0.346	0.29	0.38	0.39	0.29	0.26	0.3	0.34	1				

M5	3		0	0	4	6	9	4	8	0				
eWO	0.29	0.335	0.34	0.45	0.42	0.17	0.32	0.4	0.44	0.34	1			
M4	7		1	3	3	2	0	6	1	5	0			
eWO	0.24	0.303	0.32	0.38	0.35	0.24	0.28	0.26	0.36	0.29	0.47	1		
M3	1		6	3	7	5	7	5	9	6	4	0		
eWO	0.25	0.334	0.29	0.43	0.35	0.18	0.32	0.35	0.37	0.32	0.46	0.4	1	
M2	4		7	3	4	7	3	7	9	7	4	7	0	
eWO	0.17	0.307	0.24	0.4	0.36	0.15	0.32	0.31	0.33	0.3	0.34	0.28	0.411	1
M1	9		6	9	1	2	9	5	6	0	2	3		0

Note that each correlation is noteworthy at the threshold of 0.01; E- word-of-mouth, purchase (& brand image (E-WOM, BI, PI).

Structural Model:

The standardised coefficients of route regression, which represent the direct impact of the predictor on the research model's projected latent variables, are shown in the figure below along with the appropriate t-values for the pathways. The table below shows the cut-off value and related fit indices for the structural model. The goodness-of-fit numbers demonstrate some reasonable agreement between the structural model and the data. The 3-element model's chi-square value was 77.244 (d.f = 54, p = 0.003). The total chi-square was significant for this measurement model (p 0.05), despite the fact that it is well known that this statistic is penetrating to big sample numbers. The value of the chi-square is commonly divided by the number of degrees of freedom in order to make the chi-square statistics less confusing. The chi-square value was recalculated to be 1.044, and with the correct value cut-off, this new value ranges from 1.0 to 3.0.

The goodness fit index (GFI) of 0.958, the Tucker-Lewis index of 0.996, the comparative fit index of 0.933, and the comparative fit index of 0.997 all above the necessary threshold of 0.90. Third, the structural model was an acceptable match, according to the root means approximation square error (RMSEA), one of the better indicators for our large-sample model (RMSEA = 0.013, with values 0.08 representing good fit).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Estimate	Standardized Estimate	Standard error	t-statistic	p
eWOM	BI	0.810	0.762	0.136	6.559	***
eWOM	PI	0.507	0.367	0.161	3.137	.002*
BI	PI	0.709	0.598	0.143	4.976	***
**Significant at p < 0.001 level (two-tailed)						
* Significant at p < 0.05 level (two-tailed)						

	Structural Model		Cut of Value	
Model fit Statistics	Chi-Square	77.245		
	df	74		
	p-value	< 0.05		
	Normed Chi-Square	1.044	Between 1 & 3	Excellent
	GFI	.958	> 0.90	Excellent
	NFI	**.933**	> 0.90	Excellent
	CFI	.997	>0.90	Excellent
	TLI	.996	> 0.90	Excellent
	IFI	.997	>0.90	Excellent
	RMR	.029	< 0.50	Excellent
	RMSEA	.013	< 0.08	Excellent
	Model fit is excellent			

Table 5 displays the outcomes of each test used to evaluate the significance of the relationship between the variables. Given that customer e-WOM engagement was a valid indicator of brand image, and with = 0.890, t = 6.558, and p = 0.000, it can be said that e-WOM had a highly positive impact on the brand image. Another area where e-WOM excelled was purchase intention (=0.506, t=3.136, p=0.002).

These findings show that e-WOM plays a major antecedent role in consumers' behavior expectations relative to other kinds of advertising. The numbers 0.708, 4.975, and 0.000 show that consumer purchase intentions were influenced by brand image as well as that brand image preceded customer purchase intentions.

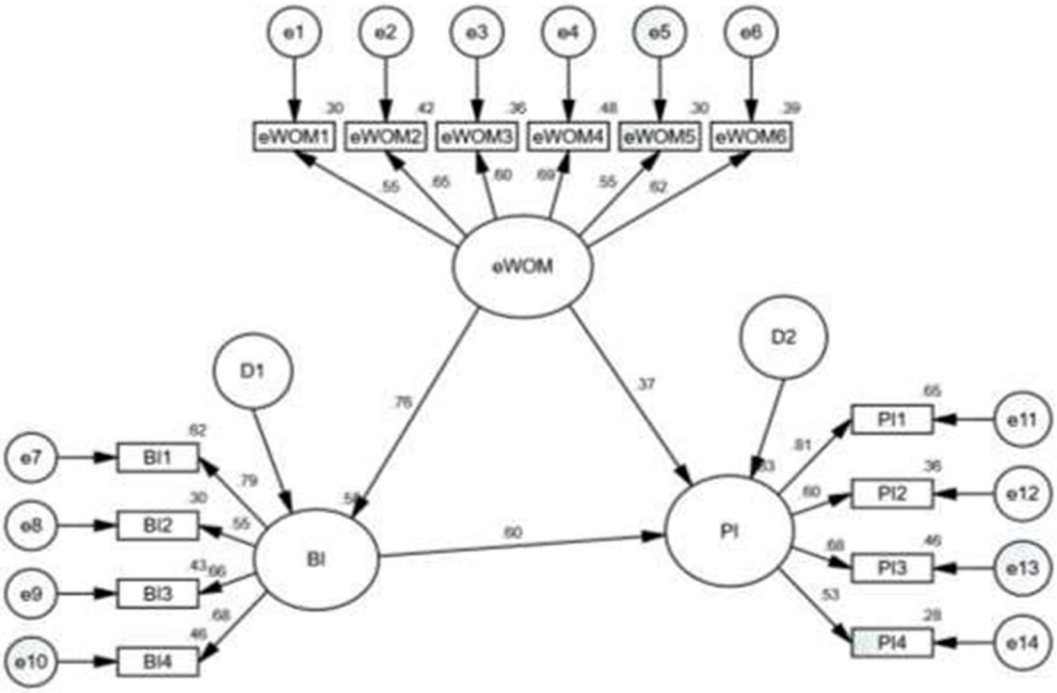

Figure 2: Proposed model using standardized regression coefficients

In order to analyze the interaction between the two variables purchase intention, we also evaluated the performance of the direct, indirect, and total impacts (see below table). How e-WOM directly influences purchase intention (0.506) is very noteworthy. The study also demonstrates that e-WOM indirectly affects brand image, which in turn affects purchasing intention (0.630).

Table 6: Decomposition of the study model's overall impacts

Independent Variable	Dependent variable	Total effect	Direct Effect	Indirect effect
eWOM	BI	.891	.891	.000
eWOM	PI	1.137	.507	.631
BI	PI	.709	.709	.000

Conclusion and Future Research: The absence of a clearly defined product category is one of the study's limitations. Further study on this subject is required. To increase generalizability, no particular product category was taken into account in this experiment. Future studies might be able to reach a more focused conclusion by adding just one product category (like electrical products). Other product kinds (such as high vs. low engagement products, search vs. experience products, etc.) may also be included in future research studies.

The study's unclear foundation is even another problem. On a variety of online venues, including blogs, social networking sites, and e-commerce websites, e-WOM is present.

Now, firms with active social media accounts and conventional e-commerce websites both sell products to Indian clients online. In order to gain a deeper knowledge, future academics can concentrate their research on a certain internet platform (like Facebook). Future academics can look at many platforms to understand the effects of e-WOM. Future studies on the significance of e-WOM in the context of Indian clientele may find the study's findings to be helpful.

This study contains useful information for researchers that are interested in the internet buying habits and brand perception of Indian consumers. A better comprehension of the function that e-WOM performs in e-commerce and online purchases can be helpful to marketing professionals and decision-makers alike. The government can take the necessary steps to guarantee that e-WOM is accessible on various online platforms.

When Indian customers use online platforms for any kind of transaction, they also take the layout and information on offer into account. Therefore, if customers find that online businesses are offering more lucrative designs or products, they will be more likely to join up for or make a purchase from them. To find out how these internet businesses may make their platforms more appealing to customers, further research is still required.

Future research will benefit from the concepts from this study addressing how to arrange brand images and make the brand accessible in accordance with customer preferences to foster a beneficial and favourable purchase intention. Customers have less time to physically visit stores because there are so many online retailers today.

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