

The Impact of Placing Electronic Word of Mouth on Instagram on Consumers' Purchase Intention: Case Study of Food Products in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Nora Abdullah Abdulaziz Al-Masoud

Al-Safa District, Al-Rabwah, Exit 15, Riyadh, 11511, Prince Mohammed Bin Abdulaziz
Hospital

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

E-mail: nora.abdullah.almasoud@gmail.com

Received: September 6, 2020 Accepted: November 13, 2020 Published: November 28, 2020

doi:10.5296/jebi.v7i2.17639

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jebi.v7i2.17639>

Abstract

Social media networks like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, present promising opportunities for facilitating usability of e-WOM as a rising purchase decision-making tool. In tandem, this study aimed at looking into the impact of placing the e-WOM on Instagram on consumers' purchase intention to food products in the KSA with a focus on purchase intention and decision. A quantitative research strategy was adopted through the survey method, where questionnaires were distributed through online survey-monkey to Instagram subscribers and dwellers of the KSA. Descriptive and inferential statistical data analyses were applied to generate useful information, and a documentary review was performed to supplement the primary findings. This study established that characteristics of e-WOM, attributes of the e-WOM reviewer, characteristics of social media site for e-WOM, demographic aspects of consumer, and reputation of the brand, influence effectiveness of e-WOM and customer purchase intention and decision on products. Significantly, it was established that quality, quantity, recency, and consistency, of e-WOM impact customer purchase intention and purchase decision towards food products. Nevertheless, it was ascertained that most respondents trust e-WOM as an objective and effective purchase decision-making tool. However, this study was conducted in the KSA and majorly employed quantitative rather than mixed-methods methodology, thus limiting its generalizability.

This study originates from the need to improve marketing strategies given the growth of social media marketing against traditional marketing. Likewise, it adds value to existing knowledge about marketing practice and recommends further research in comparing the impact of e-WOM on customer purchase intention, decision, experience, and loyalty, across various social media sites and different nations for the generalized understanding of e-WOM

as a marketing tool.

Keywords: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM), Instagram Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Purchase Intension, Purchase Decision, Food Products

1. Introduction

This chapter presents background information for the research subject and context explored during this study. It provides an overview of the posting of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on Instagram and subsequent perceived impact on consumers' purchase intention towards food products in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Furthermore, the chapter provides the background of this study, the statement of the research problem, the research purpose, the research objectives, the research questions, and the research hypotheses. It also depicts the contributions of this study, the expected limitation of this study, and the definitions of key terms in this study.

1.1 Background of this Study

Humans have constantly communicated with each other, sharing, and talking about everything, everywhere, and anytime. In this situation, it is common to share views, experiences, disagreements, or advice for informal communication. When it comes to making purchase decisions, consumers tend to look for credible information about products (Lange & Elliot, 2012; Attia *et al.*, 2012); which is why word of mouth (WOM), implying oral communication between customers, has increasingly become a trustworthy source of information, and impactful on customer purchase decisions (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). Previous studies on WOM have indicated that it influences consumer decisions, and helps create purchase wakefulness which means the observation of behavioral states (Allsopet *et al.*, 2007; McGriff, 2012).

In the age of the Internet, the power of customers has been increasing due to opportunities and technologies enabling them to connect with a large number of people and to create an exchange of independent information about products among them. Specifically, consumers can develop self-modified content with visual aids and share it with a multitude of other users at a fast speed without the constraint of geography and time-zones (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Chu & Kim, 2011).

Due to the presence of several Internet-based platforms such as websites, blogs, and various social media networks; there have emerged online WOM is known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). It serves as a decision aid, a consumer feedback mechanism, and a recommendation system in an online platform (Fakharyan & Elyasi, 2012). Similarly, Lis and Horst (2015) indicated that customer integration with e-WOM positively influences their commitment, brand trust, and willingness to pay. According to several studies; social media networks like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Blogs, present promising opportunities for the usability of e-WOM due to their efficiency in providing a platform to create, exchange, and discuss information among people (Wang *et al.*, 2012; Das & Mandal, 2016; Erkan & Evans, 2016). However, there is still limited research and publications in

regards to e-WOM and its perceived effect on consumers' decision-making during purchase, particularly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Almana & Mirza, 2013).

Hence, this study investigates the perceived impact of placing e-WOM on Instagram on consumers' purchase intention towards food products in KSA. Particularly, this study is interested in what factors associated with e-WOM like consistency, quality, quantity, correctness, recency, brand, website, and demographics, influence consumers' purchase decision. This will help businesses, particularly dealing with food products in KSA, have effective marketing strategies for the needs of consumers.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

Social media has changed and challenged traditional assumptions about the marketing process (Grönroos, 2004). In particular, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has allowed consumers to come to more reasoned and rational outcome during decision-making on purchases by exposing them to inter-peer reviews of products instead of commercially biased traditional marketing tools (Trusov, M., Bucklin, R.E., and Pauwels, K., 2009). Some studies; a discourse that social media networks like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, present promising opportunities for facilitating the application of e-WOM due to their efficiency in providing a platform to create, exchange and discuss information about products and services among the consumers (Wang *et al.*, 2012; Das & Mandal, 2016; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Hence, there is a need to understand the effect of e-WOM on consumers and the mechanism behind it to improve marketing efficiency. However, there is still limited research and publications as regards e-WOM and the effect it has on consumers' decision-making during purchase, particularly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Almana & Mirza, 2013). This study investigates the impact of placing e-WOM on Instagram on consumers' purchase intention towards food products in KSA. This study measures what variables like; consistency, quantity, quality, correctness, brand reputation, reviewer attributes, recency, demographics, and characteristics of online site, associated with e-WOM, influence the customer purchase intention on food products.

1.3 Research Purpose

This study seeks to explore the impact of placing the electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on Instagram on consumers' purchase intention towards food products in KSA. The interest of this study is the factors associated with e-WOM like consistency, quality, quantity, recency, correctness, reviewer, demographics, brand, and others, influence consumers' attitudes like purchase intention and purchase decision. This will help businesses, particularly in the food sector in KSA, to develop effective marketing strategies to meet the needs of their consumers.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To understand which e-WOM reviews on Instagram influence customers' purchase intention of food products in KSA.

2. To explore perceptions of respondents on the use of e-WOM placed on Instagram as a purchase decision-making tool.
3. To establish characteristics of online sites for e-WOM reviews like popularity influence customer's choice online site for e-WOM as a purchasing decision-making tool.
4. To explore the change of the effect of e-WOM on Instagram on customers' purchase intention to food products concerning customer demographic characteristics like gender, age, residence, education, and income.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

This research attempts to establish the impact of placing e-WOM on Instagram on the purchase intention of consumers towards food products in the KSA. Subsequently, this research developed the following hypotheses for guiding this study:

H₀: Characteristics associated with placement of e-WOM on Instagram have no impact on consumer purchase intention.

H₁: Characteristics associated with placement of e-WOM on Instagram have an impact on consumer purchase intention.

H₀: Impact of e-WOM placement on Instagram on consumer purchase intention is not influenced by the demographic status of the consumer.

H₂: Impact of e-WOM placement on Instagram on consumer purchase intention is influenced by the demographic status of the consumer.

1.7 Contribution of This Study

Despite the growing interest by consumers in utilizing electronic word of mouth via various social media networks as a tool for making purchase decisions; there is still limited research on the impact of placing e-WOM on social media as a purchase intention or decision-making tool, particularly for food products in KSA. This study contributes towards this empirical and gap and attempts to establish the effect and usefulness of posting e-WOM on Instagram as a decision-making technique for marketers, consumers, and decision-makers, in KSA. This study explores the effect of e-WOM on Instagram on consumers' attitudes, which clarifies the needs of consumers and improving the success of marketing for food products in KSA.

As inbound which means (to highlight goods and services indirectly; (Patruti-Baltes, L., 2016) or bottom-to-top based marketing strategy gains over conventional outbound which means to promote the products and services to the audience directly; (Patruti-Baltes, L., 2016), top-to-bottom approach, consumers increasingly become key determinants in the success of marketing strategies and this is exacerbated by growing usage of social media networks by consumers. Hence, outcomes of this research can be further exploited by enterprises like dessert shops, companies, hotels, restaurants, and others, to understand customers' needs and maximize the success of their marketing strategies.

According to (Casprini, Di Minin, and Paraboschi, 2018) that the social media marketing practice is still nascent with great potential in the future, this research paves way for further studies to triangulate or dispute its outcomes; motivating researchers to navigate issues surrounding the placement of e-WOM on social media networks, from respondents at the grassroots level, hence, not only contributing to the existing wealth of knowledge on social media marketing techniques but also enabling marketers to develop suitable strategies. Also, this research gives insight into the effect of e-WOM on purchasing intention in the Saudi food market and would encourage further research into exploring other market sectors.

2. Methodology:

2.1 Research Design

Based totally on Parahoo (2006) the design preferred for studies should be the only maximum first-rate so one can acquire an answer to the items of studies query. It is a framework or blueprint for undertaking the research projects. It specifies the details of the tactics essential for obtaining the statistics needed to structure or clear up research issues (Malhotra, 2010). A suitable research layout is essential as it determines the kind of information, information collection approach, the sampling method, the timetable, and the budget (Hair et al., 2004).

2.2 Classification of Research Design

Research design can be widely categorized as exploratory or conclusive. The number one object of exploratory studies is to offer insights into the expertise of the problem confronting the researcher. The insights won from exploratory studies are probably validated or quantified by using conclusive studies. The goal of conclusive research is to test the precise hypothesis and study unique relationships. This requires that the researcher specify the statistics wished.

The descriptive study is described as a sort of conclusive research that has its important goals. Descriptive research is an evaluation of exploratory research, is marked through a clear statement of the problem, precise hypothesis, and targeted facts wishes (Malhotra, 2010) Exploratory studies are the preliminary step inside the typical research layout framework. It has to in most times be accompanied by using descriptive or casual studies. For instance, the proposition developed through exploratory research must be statistically examined the usage of descriptive informal studies (Malhotra, 2010). According to Malhotra (2010) defined there are 3 forms of studies design which is descriptive, exploratory, and causal, as shown in the table below:

Table 1. A comparison of the three basic research design

	Descriptive	Explanatory	Causal
Characteristics	Marked by the prior establishment of a specific hypothesis, pre-planned and structure design	Flexible, often the front end of the total research design	More independent variable; control of other mediating variables
Objective	Describe characteristics or function	Discover ideas and insights	Cause and effect relationship
Methods	Primary and secondary data; survey and observation	The pilot survey, qualitative research, expert survey	Experiments

Source: Malhotra, (2010)

2.3 Research Design in this Study

This research will adopt a descriptive research layout with pre-determined research objectives, research questions, and specific hypotheses, within a specific body of knowledge. The quantitative method is applied to this study and its hypotheses, concerning characteristics determining the effect of e-WOM on customers' purchase intention.

2.4 Data Required for this Study

Data may be referred to as facts, values, statistics, or information that has been collected, generated, or created to validate the research findings. Data for research can be categorized as either primary data which is original data as gathered by the researcher from fieldwork, particularly from respondents through various methods and instruments; or secondary data obtained from other sources for other purposes but relevant to the topic being studied.

Table 2. Primary data versus secondary data

	PRIMARY DATA	SECONDARY DATA
COLLECTION PURPOSE	For the problem at hand	For other problem
COLLECTION PROCESS	Very involved	Rapid and easy
COLLECTION COST	High	Relatively low
COLLECTION TIME	Long	Short

In this research, data were collected from respondents through questionnaires, placement of e-WOM on Instagram, and documentary review based on previous studies. The data gathered included: characteristics of reviews on food products posted on Instagram like quality, quantity, consistency, timeliness, correctness, brand, and their influence on customers' purchasing decisions. The effects of e-WOM on customer purchase decisions concerning socio-demographic factors; perceptions of respondents regarding e-WOM, and determinants for choosing e-WOM and respective reviewers. The sources of data needed, included; consumers, marketers in social media, organizations which working on marketing, and literature on previous studies.

2.6 Research Process

Research is a process of systematic inquiry into a problem or phenomenon that involves; identification of the problem; performing too relative literature review; developing a research design, gathering of data, documenting critical information; as well as, analysis and interpretation of the gathered data or information according to a suitable and logical methodology acceptable by professional fields and academic disciplines. Therefore, in exploring the influence of placing e-WOM on Instagram on customers' purchase intention towards food products in the KSA, the research process followed is as illustrated in figure 1 below:

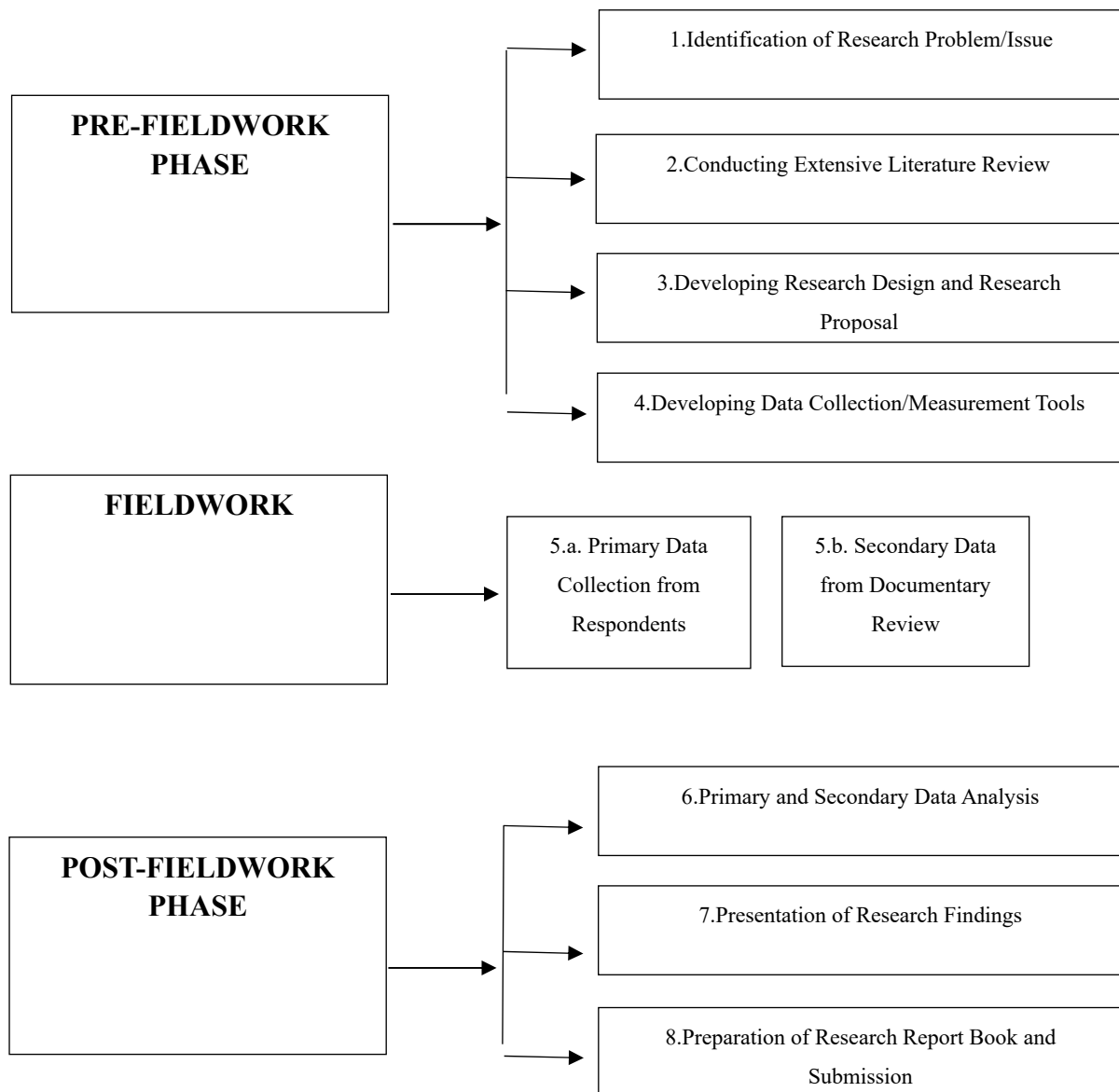


Figure 1. Research Process Framework

Source: Smart Bug media (2018).

2.7 Measurement Tools

The researcher used a valid and reliable 5-point Likert scale questionnaires where: 1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neither Disagree nor Agree; 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree; to collect data related to variables and respective indicators during this study from the previous study. Hence, this researcher undertook several initiatives like; extensive literature review, consultation with experts in marketing, and pre-tests (pilot study), to have a suitable measurement tool in this case a questionnaire. Important is that the measurement tool was modified from the instrument used in a previous but related peer-reviewed study; thus, enhancing its validity, reliability, and applicability.

2.8 Reliability Test

Bryan & Bell (2007) defined reliability as the ability of a research instrument to produce a reliable or consistent degree of findings. This researcher conducted a pre-test on various items or variables intended to be tested using the prepared questionnaire. The indication of values of Pearson's coefficient (r) for all items was all significant, indicating that the measurement of these items had the feature of good, strong, or very strong stability and/or consistency.

2.9 Validity Test

Validity is defined as the ability of the instrument to measure or produce the expected results or findings and can be generalized from a sample to a population. In this case, the developed questionnaire was subjected to four expert-review in the field of marketing to determine the extent to which the instrument would accurately measure constructs, variables, or indicators being measured. Furthermore, the measurement instrument was developed basing on a measurement instrument already applied in a previous peer-reviewed but related study; hence, enhancing its validity (Litwin, 1995).

2.10 Sampling

A research sample refers to a group of people, objects, items, or things that are drawn from a larger population or universe for measurement or testing during the research (Kothari, 2004). The sample for research was representative of the target population and diverse enough to allow for generalization of findings established. The sampling process should define the target population; figure out the sampling frame; decide on sampling technique; and execute the sampling technique (Malhotra, 2006).

2.11 Target Population

Hair et al. (2004) defined the target population as an itemized group of human beings to which research questions may be posed for answering or observation made to solve the research problem. In this case, the target population will be the residents of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who access social media networks, are subscribers of Instagram or followers of Instagram influencers, and acquainted with the e-WOM as a marketing and purchase decision-making tool.

2.12 Sampling Frame

The sampling frame may be referred to as an illustration or a list of factors of the target population. The sampling frame or research list consists of a listing or set of directions for figuring out the target population and enable the researcher to obtain a suitable sample for the study. Given the nature of this study, a sampling frame was not compiled. If the respondent met the pre-determined criteria involving being residence of the KSA, subscriber of Instagram or follower of Instagram influencer, and participates or is acquainted with e-WOM reviews and ratings, then one qualified for filling the online questionnaire distributed online through survey-monkey. However, more follow-up information about respondents for verification would also be obtained through E-mail or WhatsApp.

2.13 Sampling Technique

This study decided to adopt a purposive or judgmental sampling technique rather than a probabilistic sampling technique to draw a sample of qualified research respondents who responded to online questionnaires. That is, this researcher used expertise judgment (the four marketing experts) basing on consultation, personal experience as a practicing marketer on different companies, and pre-determined criteria to select respondents for this study. The respondent was required to be residing in KSA at the time of this study; subscribe with Instagram or follow Instagram influencer; and acquainted with e-WOM. Furthermore, a willing respondent could also be able to submit a filled questionnaire. Moreover, key informants with expertise in matters regarding social media networks and social media marketing features were purposefully sampled to provide their wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience for this study from different companies. Given that this researcher would adopt a purposive sampling method in an objective and rational manner basing on practicing experience to enable obtaining key and expert answers to questions of this study. Hence, experts have been exposed to marketing strategies through personal business.

2.14 Sample Size

The sample size refers to the number of quantity of factors, units, respondents, or subjects, expected to be studied. It should be emphasized that the larger the sample the more representative of the target population or universe it is. Furthermore, the researcher should make efforts to ensure that the response rate is as high as possible for the validity of the study. In this study, 200 respondents were distributed with questionnaires; however, 180 respondents (90%) returned the questionnaires. 179 of 180 (99.4%) returned questionnaires were fully completed and qualified for data analysis.

2.15 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves examining, categorizing, tabulating, and testing data collected to discover meaningful information. The study used descriptive and inferential statistical analysis through MS Excel, to organize, manipulate, and infer data for meaningful findings.

2.15.1 Descriptive Statistical Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical data analysis was performed using MS Excel to describe, organize, and summarize a large amount of quantitative data obtained during this research so that meaningful information such as distribution patterns, trends or scatter would emerge. The researcher used MS Excel software as a tool to generate; measures of central tendency like MEAN, RANGE, MODE, and MEDIAN, to indicate the central position concerning the distribution of data; and measures of dispersion like STANDARD DEVIATION and VARIANCE to provide information on how data collected spread or scatter from a central position.

2.15.2 Inferential Statistical Data Analysis

This researcher performed inferential statistical data analysis to establish the nature of relationships between the research variables or data sets so that to make inferences or

predictions basing on the data collected from a sample of respondents tested. Microsoft Excel software was used as a tool to establish relationships between independent and dependent variables, categorical variables, as well as, reliability of data sets due to *test and re-test* process during the pilot (pre-tests); through the generation of Pearson's r correlation coefficient which was expected to range from $r = 1.00$ (perfect, positive, linear relationship) to $r = -1.00$ (perfect, negative, linear relationship), and any value between the two, considering that $r = 0.00$ would indicate no linear relationship existed between variables tested during this study. Also, Chi-Square Test was performed to establish the presence or absence of significant relationships between categorical variables (nominal and ordinal variables), including; gender (female and male) age-range, education level, income level, place of living, and duration of access to social media networks. Moreover, this study used the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to establish if there were significant differences among MEANS of groups or variables (dependent and independent variables) in this study.

2.16 Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent; the research respondents were adequately informed about the purpose of this research, expected consequences (benefits and adverse effects), expected duration of research, incentives for participation, and whom participants would contact in case of questions. Participants were also informed through E-mail, their rights to anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy, voluntary participation, data sharing, and archiving, before signing the Informed Consent Form.

3. Results

3.1 Chi-Square Test on Categorical Variables

Basing on the assumption that NO relationship exists between the categorical values in the population, that is they are independent of each other. However, the absence of a relationship between variables in the population may not necessarily imply the absence of some relationship in the sample. Hence, this study performed CHI-SQUARE TEST on selected categorical variables, including; gender-female and male, against age, education level, income level, place of living, and duration of social media access, and confirmed that the variables have significant relationships; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

This researcher organized the observed values on an MS Excel worksheet and used them to generate expected values, which underwent CHI-SQUARE TEST to establish the presence or absence of relationships.

Table 3. Observed Values for Gender * Age

	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
UNDER 20	1	5	6
21-30	31	26	57
31-40	22	32	54
41-50	10	25	35
51-60	4	15	19
61-70	0	6	6
ABOVE 70	0	2	2
TOTAL	68	111	179

Table 4. Expected Values for Gender * Age

FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
2.27933	3.72067	6
21.65363	35.34637	57
20.51397	33.48603	54
13.29609	21.70391	35
7.217877	11.78212	19
2.27933	3.72067	6
0.759777	1.240223	2
68	111	179

3.2 Pearson Correlation Coefficient

The Pearson product-moment correlation is used to determine the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two continuous variables. Its value can range from -1 for a perfect negative linear relationship to +1 for a perfect positive linear relationship. A value of 0 (zero) indicates no relationship between the two variables. This test is also known by its shorter titles, the Pearson correlation, or Pearson's correlation. In our study, the researcher has performed the test between the four dimensions in the study, and between the first dimension with the rest dimensions (combined). The test was preforming at a 0.01 significant level. Therefore, the view of electronic word of mouth literature and the traditional word of mouth literature that people believe people like themselves for WOM and especially e-WOM, also, e-WOM give credibility which leads to purchase intention of low involvement, low risk, and spontaneous purchases.

Table 41. Correlation coefficient for all dimensions

		Instagram Behaviour (Purchase Intention)	Electronic Word of Mouth Usage	Electronic Word of Mouth Reviewers and Influencers	Social Media Network and/or Brand Presenting Electronic Word of Mouth	Dimensions 2,3, and 4
Instagram Behaviour (Purchase Intention)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.144	-.041	-.067	-.121
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.069	.612	.413	.126
	N	171	161	154	151	161
Electronic Word of Mouth Usage	Pearson Correlation	-.144	1	.510**	.541**	.750**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.069		.000	.000	.000
	N	161	161	154	151	161

Electronic Word of Mouth Reviewers and Influencers	Pearson Correlation	-.041	.510**	1	.373**	.765**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.612	.000		.000	.000
	N	154	154	154	151	154
Social Media Network and/or Brand Presenting Electronic Word of Mouth Dimensions 2,3, and 4	Pearson Correlation	-.067	.541**	.373**	1	.744**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.413	.000	.000		.000
	N	151	151	151	151	151
	Pearson Correlation	-.121	.750**	.765**	.744**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.126	.000	.000	.000	
	N	161	161	154	151	161

** Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.3 Analysis of Variance Test (ANOVA)

This statistical test was conducted to establish if the differences in means of groups or variables tested through the Likert scale during this study are significant or are not significant. Groups of independent variables: e-WOM usage characteristics, e-WOM reviewer characteristics, and e-WOM social media site or brand, impact on the dependent variable, purchase intention, was ranked through means, which were run through ANOVA test to establish the possibility of differences in the means established. The analysis established that there were no significant differences in the means-tested and therefore the ranking was accepted. This implies that the impact of variables tested on customers' purchase intention is largely consistent even if other groups were tested, and therefore need to be addressed.

Table 5. Means for e-WOM variables tested versus purchase intension

e-WOM Characteristics	e-WOM Reviewer	e-WOM Site and Brand
3.325	3.23376	3.456954
3.397516	2.837662	3.516556
2.962733	3.155844	3.622517
3.621118	3.370861	0
3.30719	0	0

3.4 Analysis of Demographic Characteristics

This study investigated the key demographic characteristics of participants to relate them to the usage of social media networks. In tandem, most respondents were male at 61.45% while females represented 38.55%. This is contrary to Almana and Mirza (2013) who attained 64% of female participants and 36% of male participants. Since this study was conducted online on Instagram subscribers; findings indicate substantive improvement in access to social media networks by the male. Furthermore, of the respondents surveyed, 62.01% were between the ages of 20 and 40; 34.63% were above 40 years of age, and 3.35% were under 20. These findings indicate that while the younger generation still dominates the usage of social media networks like Instagram, the older generation has also been increasingly accessing social media networks.

This research concentrated on the KSA as the area of study, whereby; the majority of respondents, 76.54%, were those living in Riyadh; 13.97% in Jeddah; 2.23% in Dammam; 1.68% in Makkah; and 0.56% in Hail. Other places in the KSA entailed 5.03% of the sample size investigated. This study disregarded respondents residing in foreign countries since it was difficult to establish their nationality. Given that the respondents were also Instagram subscribers, findings demonstrate that majority of social media users dwell in major urban areas like Riyadh and Jeddah.

Moreover, the respondents for this study were grouped into four classes of education levels; those with the bachelor's degree and master's degree represented most participants both at 68.71%; followed by those below the undergraduate level of education at 27.93%; while those with Ph.D. qualification incorporated 6% of 179 respondents surveyed. These results indicate that social media usage still associates significantly with an individual's level of education.

Likewise, this study ascertained that the percentage of respondents earning an average monthly income of less than or equal to Saudi Riyals (SR) 11,000 was 64.81; while those earning salaries above SR 11,000 up to 20,000 constituted 27.38% of the sample surveyed; while those earning salaries above SR 20,000 represented only 7.82% of the respondents. This discovery reveals that individuals with low- or mid-income earnings are increasingly accessing social media networks.

Nevertheless, this study established that 73.74% of the participants access social media networks for 12 hours or less per week; while 5.03% for 13-16 hours; 11.17% for 17-20 hours; and 10.06% for 20 hours and above. In connection, it suffices to speculate that a significant number of populations are becoming increasingly acquainted with social media platforms, and this is healthy for the future of social media-based marketing strategies like the placement of e-WOM. Similarly, it is also significant in this context, that this study found that 68.72% of respondents surveyed consider e-WOM reviews or ratings before making purchases as opposed to 31.28% who do not; whereby, 22.35% of surveyed participants contended that they make their purchase decisions instantly after reading e-WOMs; while 30.17% take hours; 24.02% spend days, and 23.46% need one or more week upon evaluating e-WOMs to conclude on their purchase decision. In summary, descriptive statistics of demographic features explored in this study are illustrated in table 5.

Table 5. Summary of respondents' demographic characteristics

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	111	61.45
	Female	68	38.55
<i>Age</i>	Under 20	6	3.35
	21-30	57	31.84
	31-40	54	30.17
	41-50	35	19.55
	51-60	19	10.61
	61-70	6	3.35
	Above 70	2	1.12

<i>Current Place of Living</i>	Dammam	4	2.23
	Hail	1	0.56
	Jeddah	25	13.97
	Makkah	3	1.68
	Riyadh	137	76.54
	Others	9	5.03
<i>Level of Education</i>	Lower Than Bachelor Degree	50	27.93
	Bachelor Degree	95	53.07
	Master Degree	28	15.64
	Doctoral Degree (PhD)	6	3.35
<i>Level of Income</i>	Below 3000 SR	22	12.29
	3001 – 5000 SR	33	18.44
	5001 – 8.000 SR	33	18.44
	8001 – 11.000 SR	28	15.64
	11.001 – 14.000 SR	18	10.06
	14.001 – 17.000 SR	18	10.06
	17.001 – 20.000 SR	13	7.26
	20.001 SR or More	14	7.82
<i>Duration of Social Media Access Per Week</i>	1 – 4 Hours	44	24.58
	5 – 8 Hours	61	34.08

	9 - 12 Hours	27	15.08
	13 - 16 Hours	9	5.03
	17 – 20 Hours	20	11.17
	20 Hours or More	18	10.06
<i>Dose Electronic Word of Mouth Affect Your Intention Before Purchase?</i>	Yes	123	68.72
	No	56	31.28
<i>How long does it take you to decide on purchasing a product after evaluating the Electronic Word of Mouth ratings on Instagram?</i>	Immediately	40	22.35
	Hours	54	30.17
	Days	43	24.02
	One Week	30	16.76
	More Than One Week	12	6.70

Source: Field Survey (2019).

3.5 Reliability

To measure the reliability of the questionnaires during analysis, the researcher performed Cronbach alpha. It is a common measure of internal consistency (a measure of reliability). It is used to determine how much the items on a scale are measuring the same underlying dimension.

Table 6. Cronbach Alpha Analysis

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.791	24

Source: Field Survey (2019).

Questionnaires were employed to measure different, underlying constructs, consisted of four dimensions and twenty-four questions. The scale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.791.

4. Discussion

4.1 H1: The Characteristic Nature of e-WOM Reviews Placed on Instagram Determines the Purchase Decision of Customers Towards Food Products:

This research hypothesis was developed to respond to research questions 1, 2, and 3. It was confirmed that the characteristic aspects of e-WOM reviews and ratings placed on Instagram influence the purchase decision of customers towards food products, although to a different extent as was ranked by the respondents surveyed during this research project.

4.2 Quality of e-WOM

This study established that the quality of e-WOM like proper spelling, good grammar, and calligraphy, is perceived by respondents as the main factor influencing a customer purchase decision. Similarly, Harun and Vedat (2016) analyzed the effect of quality components of Web 2.0 enabled e-commerce websites on e-WOM marketing, and on customer loyalty, and recommended that; e-WOM relationship with businesses should be improved through factors like aesthetics, content, orientation, system quality, information and content quality, and service quality of websites. The quality of information shared in any source has a significant impact on customer decision making (Gobinath and Gupta, 2016). On Instagram, potential customers can rate reviews of other customers if they are helpful or not; hence, the quality of e-WOM reviews determines the degree of rating it receives, which subsequently affects the potential customers. Also, the higher users' rating for a review will raise its quality. Likewise, Khan and Hashmi (2016), conducted a study to identify the impact of interactivity of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) systems on consumer e-loyalty, and the study revealed that, among others, quality of e-WOM and respective Website has a positive influence on customer purchase decision and post-purchase royalty.

4.3 Recency of e-WOM

The recency of food product e-WOM posted on Instagram was ranked as the second main characteristic of e-WOM reviews, influencing the customer's purchase decision. In other words, respondents were of the view that currently posted e-WOM command greater positive influence than the older ones. According to Xie et al. (2016), the age of posted e-WOM reviews signifies that the shared information is up-to-date. Similarly, it appears rational to consider the time difference between the date of making the purchase decision and the date when a particular review was posted. Lee, the Law, and Murphy (2011) argued that the closer the time from posting date, the more truthful, reliable, and dependable the review is considered for making a purchase decision. Generally, potential customers consider the most recent e-WOM reviews to be more relevant and helpful in their decision making.

4.4 Reliance on e-WOM

The statement testing extent to which respondents rely on e-WOM for checking food products before making a purchase decision was ranked third as a key factor impacting customer purchase decisions. In recent times the internet has turned out to be a first-rate part of many people's day by day lives, and social networking web sites like Instagram increasingly entice subscribers or followers from everywhere in the world. Likewise, e-WOM has been identified to generate the same advantages to agencies as traditional word-of-mouth and is increasingly expected to have the power to attain greater coverage and influence (Chowdhury, 2016). Furthermore, given the advantages such as; ubiquity, affordability, freedom of choice, sharing of information, and others, it suffices to contend that consumers find it imperative to check with e-WOM before making decisions on purchasing products.

4.5 Consistency of e-WOM

This study also established the consistency of e-WOM as an important determinant for customer purchase decision making. The consistency of online review implies their reliability and stability and reflects the level of heterogeneity of the posted reviews and feedback by the previous consumers. That is to say, the consistency of online reviews measures the commonness of one opinion across reviewers, and eventually, consumers tend to show a positive attitude towards those products where there is more consistency concerning e-WOM reviews (Claus and Changchit, 2017). Hence, in conformity with this study, e-WOM consistency may lead to positive purchase decisions of products by consumers.

However, the statement testing on whether consumers were worried about their purchase decision in case they did not follow the e-WOM presented on Instagram was ranked below average. This indicates that despite the growing usage of e-WOM by potential and existing customers, across all socio-demographic categories like age, gender, income, education, and place of living, there are other techniques as traditional word-of-mouth or traditional marketing techniques, which though tend to be highly controlled by businesses, that is, business-to-customer (B2C) model rather than customer-to-business (C2B) model, they can relatively serve a similar purpose as e-WOM.

4.6 The Attributes of Social Media Network to Which e-WOM is Placed Like Popularity and Reliability Affect the Purchase Decision of Customers Towards Food Products:

This study proved that various attributes of social media network to which e-WOM is placed affect the purchase decision of customers towards food products:

4.7 Popularity of Social Media Network

The popularity of social media networks was ranked as a key attribute in determining consumer's choice of social media site on which e-WOM reviews and ratings are placed and effect on consumer's purchase decisions. e-WOM as a purchase decision-making tool is based on the efficiency of consumers to connect, create, publish, and share content related to products. Hence, the more popular social media network is like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Pinterest, the more consumers it will attract with vast levels of

experience and knowledge regarding a product(s); hence, good for making a purchase decision.

4.8 Reliability of Social Media Network

How reliable is social media network was established as among the major factors determining the choice of social media network to which e-WOM is placed by the consumer during the making of the purchase decision? It is factual that the power of e-WOM as a purchase decision-making tool is based on ubiquity, speed, connectivity or interactivity, consistency, quality, among other factors, which are strongly embedded in reliability. Hence, reliability becomes a significant attribute associated with digital platform posting e-WOM, and participants expressed willingness to use any other social media site other than Instagram as long as it is reliable.

4.9 Instagram as Social Media Site for Placing e-WOM

This study inquired participants' views regarding the usage of Instagram other than other social media networks for reading e-WOM reviews and ratings. Most of the respondents indicated a preference for using and trusting Instagram. Generally, Instagram is simple and provides an easy mechanism to share pictures and videos with hash-tags that allow other people to find subscriber's posts. According to Singh et al. (2000), image-based elements are viewed as highly effective in persuading consumers and influencing their purchase intention and decision. Furthermore, Instagram has increasingly become more popular and dominated by reputable social media influencers, hence, become a catalyst for preference by most participants surveyed.

4.10 The Reputation of the Brand Associated with Product e-WOM Placed on Instagram Influences Purchase Decision of Customers Regarding Food Products

Research respondents ranked first the brand tied to e-WOM posted on Instagram as a key determinant in influencing customers' purchase decisions towards food products. Above all, the brand is important as far as product recognition, purchase, recall, and loyalty is concerned. Hence, the negative or positive reputation of the brand presents a greater impact in encouraging or discouraging customers' purchase intention towards online reviewed and rated food products. This necessitates the need for businesses and marketers to ensure proper brand management and reputation. It is of significance that previous studies have established that negative reviews or ratings associated with a product or brand are more impactful than positive reviews or ratings associated with product or brand. Daughtery and Hoffman (2013) constructed a conceptual framework related to e-WOM and posited that, among others, e-WOM message valence (negative or positive message) and brand type will interact to influence consumer attention with a stronger effect.

4.11 Respondents Agree that e-WOM Placement on Social Media Networks Like Instagram has a Significant Effect on Purchase Decision of Customers Towards Food Products

Participants in this study indicated that they trust, and perceive e-WOM placement on social media sites like Instagram as being of significant impact in influencing customers' purchase

intention and decision on food products. In tandem, the majority of respondents agreed that they make their purchase decisions instantly or sometime after evaluating related e-WOM reviews. Studies (Phelps et al., 2004; Ha, 2006; Keller, 2007; Daughtery & Hoffman, 2013) present e-WOM reviews and ratings not only as crucial elements of marketing but also as being perceived by consumers as credible and more authentic assessments concerning products for purchase.

H2: The Customer Demographics Features Like Gender, Age, Education, Place of Living, and Income, Influence Customer's Usage of e-WOM in Making Purchase Decisions Regarding Food Products:

This hypothesis was tested to respond to research question 4 of this study. It was established that demographic variables as associated with consumers have impact on customer's access to social media networks like Instagram, and subsequently their purchase intention and decision, particularly regarding food products in the KSA.

4.12 Gender of Consumer

Given that this study was conducted online through survey-monkey on respondents subscribing with Instagram; it acted as a proper indicator regarding access to social media networks along with gender categories. In connection, this study established that 62% (111 of 179 respondents) who participated in this study were male, while 38% (68 of 179 participants) were female. This finding implies that more male than female access social media networks, hence, are likely to make use of e-WOM in making their purchase decisions. Such a view is shared with other studies (Vaidehi, 2014; Lian and Yen, 2014; Thamizhvanan and Xavier, 2013; El Ansary & Roushdy, 3013; Fan & Miao, 2012). Conversely, Clemes et al. (2014) found that despite dominant access to social media networks by a male, female tend to carry out online purchase activities than male.

4.13 Age of Consumer

This study established that participants of young age between 21-50 years constituted the largest group accessing social media services, hence, are more likely to use the e-WOM reviews and ratings as decision-making tools for their purchase process. However, lower access to social media networks was ascertained at the age of under 20 years and above 50 years. This finding conforms with Clemes et al. (2014) who revealed that due to their past internet experience, younger consumers tend to prefer online-related purchase activities more than older consumers.

4.14 Education Level of Consumer

This study affirmed that participants with Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree informed 70% of participants who were surveyed online through survey-monkey; while those with lower than Bachelor's Degree constituted 27%, and participants with Ph.D. education were 3%. Therefore, this research concluded that education affects access to social media positively, and consumers with a higher level of education are highly likely to make use of e-WOM reviews and ratings in making decisions regarding their purchase activities. This

view is also supported by other studies (Thamizhvanna & Xavier, 2013; Punj, 2011; Gong and Maddox, 2011).

4.15 Income Level of Consumer

It was established by this study that participants with mid-income access social media networks like Instagram more than participants with a high and low level of income in the KSA. This finding implies that consumers with mid-income are more likely to make use of e-WOM reviews and ratings in their purchase decisions than those with high and low income. The impact of income level on an individual's online purchase has been controversial among researchers. While other scholars (Gong & Maddox, 2011; Punj, 2011; Hernandez et al., 2011) have argued that consumers with higher income levels are more likely to make online-based purchase activities than those who have lower income levels; studies like Clemes et al. (2014) contend that consumers who have high-income levels do not tend to prefer online-based purchase services. This researcher is of the view that with rapid growth in Internet-related technologies and more affordable devices, access to social media networks is increasingly becoming more affordable for all consumers irrespective of their income level.

4.16 Place of Living of Consumer

It was also discovered by this study that place of living influences access to social media services like e-WOM reviews and ratings, and this may impact the usage of online reviews and ratings by consumers in making purchase decisions. For example, this study found that participants who live in large cities like Riyadh and Jeddah dominated access to Instagram during this study relative to the insignificant response by participants living in smaller urban areas like Hail. This may be due to various obstacles relating to poor or lack of infrastructure, devices or gadgets, awareness, income, user-experience, as well as, cultural and religious norms being practiced.

5. Summary

This study established that the characteristic nature of e-WOM reviews or ratings placed on Instagram determines the purchase decision of customers on food products. It was confirmed that; quality of e-WOM, the quantity of positive e-WOM, high rating received by e-WOM, recency of e-WOM reviews, consistency of placing e-WOM, in that order influence customer purchase decision. However, this study ascertained that negative e-WOM significantly discourages consumer's purchase intention and decision.

Also, it was established that various characteristics of e-WOM reviewer tested during this study such as level and relevancy of education of reviewer, profession of reviewer, other reviewers' rating, frequency of e-WOM ratings by the particular reviewer(s), age of the e-WOM reviewer, the popularity of e-WOM reviewer on social media like Instagram, and the gender of e-WOM reviewer, influence customers' purchase decision on food products.

The demographic characteristics like gender, age, education level, and place of living, were found to influence the consumer's access to social media, therefore, the usage of e-WOM in making purchase decisions. However, this study discovered that with increasing

Internet-related technology, access to social media and facilitating devices have become increasingly affordable, thus enabling people of all levels of income to access social media at their preference.

The study further indicated substantive spending of time on social media and significant usage of e-WOM in making purchase decisions at various times before purchase.

This research further proved that various attributes associated with social media networks to which e-WOM is placed like; popularity of social media sites, type of social media platform like Instagram, and reliability of social media, affect the purchase decision of customers towards food product(s) reviewed on social media.

Significant to marketing practice, this study also discovered that the reputation of the brand linked to product e-WOM placed on Instagram influences the purchase decision of customers regarding the respective food product(s).

Moreover, respondents to this study agreed that e-WOM placement on social media networks like Instagram has a significant effect on the purchase decision of customers towards food products. The majority of them indicated their trust towards e-WOM agreeing that the reviews are largely objective rather than being bias; hence, can be used as a purchase decision-making tool.

References

- Almana, M. A., & Mirza, A. A. (2013). The impact of electronic word of mouth on consumers' purchasing decisions. *International Journal of Computer Applications*, 82(9). Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.401.8004&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Attia, A. M., Aziz, N., & Friedman, B. A. (2012). The impact of social networks on behavioral change: a conceptual framework. *World Review of Business Research*, 2, 91-108. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5f89/0c06e85be9c91619331fed1fbbd0a3c89102.pdf>
- Casprini, E., Di Minin, A., & Paraboschi, A. (2018). How do companies organize nascent markets? The BlaBlaCar case in the inter-city shared mobility market. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*.
- Cheung, C. M., & Thadani, D. R. (2012). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication: a literature analysis and integrative model. *Decis. Support Syst.*, 54, 461-470.
- Cheung, K. M. C., & Thadani, D. C. (2010). *The Effectiveness of Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication: A Literature Analysis*. 23rd Bled eConference, eTrust: June 20-23, 2010; Bled Slovenia.
- Chowdhury, N. (2016). *Influence of Electronic-Word-of-Mouth on Consumer Purchase Intention*. Master Thesis, Faculty of Engineering and Information Science.
- Chu, S. C., & Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (ewom) in social networking sites. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30(1), 47-75. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2501/IJA-30-1-047-075>

- Clemes, M. D., Gan, C., & Zhang, J. (2014). An empirical analysis of online shopping adoption in Beijing, China. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 21(3), 364-371.
- Das, P., & Mandal, S. (2016). Evaluating the Influence of Social Media on Brand Sacralization. *South Asian Journal of Global Business Research*; 5(3), 424-446.
- Daugherty, T., & Hoffman, E. (2013). eWOM and the importance of capturing consumer attention within social media. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20(1-2), 82-102.
- Erkan, I., & Evans, C. (2016) 'The Influence of EWOM in Social Media on Customers' Purchase Intentions: An Extended Approach to Information Adoption. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 61, 47-55.
- Fakharyan, M., Reza, M., & Elyasi, M. (2012). The influence of online word of mouth communications on tourists' attitudes Howard Islamic destinations and travel intentions: Evidence from Iran. *Journal of Business Management*, 6(33), 9533-9542.
- Fan, Y. W., & Miao, Y. F. (2012). Effect of electronic word-of-mouth on consumer purchase intention: The perspective of gender differences. *International Journal of Electronic Business Management*, 10(3), 175.
- Gobinath, J., & Gupta, D. (2016). September. Online reviews: Determining the perceived quality of information. In *2016 International Conference on Advances in Computing, Communications and Informatics (ICACCI)* (pp. 412-416). IEEE.
- Gong, W., & Maddox, L. (2011). Online buying decisions in china. *Journal of American*, (17), 43-51.
- Grönroos, C. (2004). The relationship marketing process: communication, interaction, dialogue, value. *Journal of business & industrial marketing*, 19(2), 99-113.
- Hoffman, E., & Daugherty, T. (2013). Is a picture always worth a thousand words? Attention to structural elements of eWOM for consumer brands within social media. *ACR North American Advances*.
- Jalilvand, M. R., & Samiei, N. (2012). The impact of electronic word of mouth on a tourism destination choice: testing the theory of planned behavior (TPB). *Internet Res.*, 22, 591-612.
- Keller, E. (2007). Unleashing the power of word of mouth: Creating brand advocacy to drive growth. *Journal of advertising research*, 47(4), 448-452.
- Khan, M. M., & Hashmi, H. B. A. (2016). Impact of interactivity of electronic word of mouth systems and website quality on customer e-loyalty. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences (PJCSS)*, 10(3), 486-504.
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques*. New Age International.
- Lange-Faria, W., & Elliot, S. (2012). Understanding the role of social media in destination marketing. *Tourismos. An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, 7(1).

- Lee, H. A., Law, R., & Murphy, J. (2011). Helpful reviewers in TripAdvisor, an online travel community. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(7), 675-688.
- Lian, J. W., & Yen, D. C. (2014). Online shopping drivers and barriers for older adults: Age and gender differences. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 37, 133-143.
- Lim, C. B., & Chung, C. M. Y. (2011). The impact of word-of-mouth communication on attribute evaluation. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(1), 18-23.
- Ling, A. (2014). Revisiting Impact in the Context of Unintended Consequences. *Presentation to the 2014 African Evaluation Association Conference*, Yaoundé, Cameroon.
- Lis, B., & Horst, M. (2015). Electronic Word of Mouth Impacts: A Spotlight on Customer Integration. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 10(4).
- Litwin, M. S. (1995). How to measure survey reliability and validity (Vol. 7). Sage.
- Malhotra. (2010). *Basic marketing research: Integration of social media*. Boston: Pearson.
- McGriff, J. A. (2012). A conceptual topic in marketing management: the emerging need for protecting and managing brand equity: the case of online consumer brand boycotts. *International Management Review*, 8(1), 49-54.
- Patruti-Baltes, L. (2016). Inbound Marketing-the most important digital marketing strategy. Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov. *Economic Sciences. Series V*, 9(2), 61.
- Phelps, E. A., Delgado, M. R., Nearing, K. I., & LeDoux, J. E. (2004). Extinction learning in humans: role of the amygdala and vmPFC. *Neuron*, 43(6), 897-905.
- Punj, G. (2011). Effect of consumer beliefs on online purchase behavior: the influence of demographic characteristics and consumption values. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 25(3), 134-144.
- Reza Jalilvand, M., & Samiei, N. (2012). The effect of electronic word of mouth on brand image and purchase intention: An empirical study in the automobile industry in Iran. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 30(4), 460-476.
- Singh, S., Lessig, V., Kim, D., Gupta, R., & Hocutt, M. (2000). Does Your Ad Have Too Many Pictures? *Journal of Advertising Research*, 40(1-2), 11-27. <http://www.journalofadvertisingresearch.com/content/40/1-2/11.short>
- Thamizhvanan, A., & Xavier, M. J. (2013). Determinants of customers' online purchase intention: an empirical study in India. *Journal of Indian Business Research*, 5(1), 17-32.
- Trusov, M., Bucklin, R., & Pauwels, K. (2009). Effects of Word-of-Mouth versus Traditional Marketing: Findings from an Internet Social Networking Site. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 90-102. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.90>
- Vaidehi, P. U. (2014). Factors influencing online shopping behavior of students in engineering colleges at Rangareddy district. *Sumedha Journal of Management*, 3(1), 50. <http://www.indianjournals.com/ijor.aspx?target=ijor:sjm&volume=3&issue=1&article=004>

Wang, W. (2011). The effect of inconsistent word-of-mouth during the service encounter. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 25(4), 252-259. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/08876041111143087/full/html>

Wang, X., Yu, C., & Wei, Y. (2012). Social Media Peer Communication and Impacts on Purchase Intentions: A Customer Socialization Framework. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*; 26(4), 198-208. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1094996812000072>

Xie, K. L., Chen, C., & Wu, S. (2016). Online consumer review factors affecting offline hotel popularity: evidence from tripadvisor. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 33(2), 211-223. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10548408.2015.1050538>

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright for this article is retained by the author (s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).