

Bahaaeddin Alareeni
Allam Hamdan *Editors*

Financial Technology (FinTech), Entrepreneurship, and Business Development

Proceedings of The International
Conference on Business and Technology
(ICBT 2021)

Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems

Volume 486

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Editors

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Proceedings of The International Conference
on Business and Technology (ICBT 2021)

 Springer

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ISSN 2367-3370

ISSN 2367-3389 (electronic)

Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems

ISBN 978-3-031-08086-9

ISBN 978-3-031-08087-6 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08087-6>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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The Influence of Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication on Consumer Purchase Intention



Wan Farha Wan Zulkiffli, Siti Afiqah Zainuddin,
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Abstract The innovation of the Internet has led to the revolution of consumer behaviour and purchase intention throughout the consumer decision-making process. It provides a huge opportunity for businesses to anticipate the increasing value of online retail. Particularly in Malaysia, the number of Internet users has given rise pertaining to current trends which involved exhaustive use of social networking in terms of patterns of getting information among users and e-commerce experience. As social media becomes a vital part of people's daily life, the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) surpasses the influence of traditional face-to-face WOM communication on consumers' decision making. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the persuasiveness of eWOM messages and consumer's attitude to use information which turns into behaviour intention in the online context among Malaysian young consumers. Convenience sampling was employed to select sample among young generation who at least have one social media account. Data were collected using questionnaires. A total of 440 effective samples were collected and the analyses were carried out using both descriptive analysis and structural equation modelling (SEM). The findings showed Source credibility, Source presence, eWOM quantity and eWOM attractiveness are the factors that influence online purchase intention.

Keywords Internet · Social media · Online purchase intention · Electronic word of mouth

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1 Introduction

Consumers have been given great opportunity to search for information on products and services by the advent of social media. Erkan and Evan (2016) and Wan Zulkiffi et al. (2017) defined word of mouth (WOM) as an action that exchange opinions and experiences among peoples. Variety of past research regarding WOM has been carried out towards consumers' product judgements (Chung and Austria 2010; Yildirim 2011), and purchase intention (Kudeshia and Kumar 2017; Zhao et al. 2017). Thus, making the presence of Internet a great platform for consumers to exchange their opinions towards a larger audience. The advantages of eWOM (such as increasing brand popularity and sales) has led to many studies on eWOM been carried out (Cheung and Thadani 2012; King et al. 2014). The results from most of these studies showed eWOM is an effective marketing instrument (Bickart and Schindler 2001).

Some of the platforms used for eWOM are blogs, consumer review websites, discussion forums, shopping websites and social media websites (Cheung and Thadani 2012; Ismail et al. 2019). These platforms are used by consumers to find suitable information on products and services. For example, blogs by studies from Chu and Kamal (2008) and Lin et al. (2012), consumer review websites (Cheung et al. 2008; Gauri et al. 2008), discussion forums (Chiou and Cheng 2003; Huang and Chen 2006), and shopping websites (Lee et al. 2008; Li and Zhan 2011; Hong et al. 2019). However, less attention towards eWOM on social media (Cheung and Thadani 2012; Erkan and Evans 2016) even though there are a few existing studies (See-To and Ho 2014; Wang et al. 2012).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify persuasiveness of eWOM messages (source credibility, social presence, eWOM quantity, and eWOM attractiveness) towards online purchase intention in social media platform among Malaysian young consumers. It commences with the overview of the eWOM messages, which emphasizes social media communication as part of online marketing platform and relates to consumer buying intention. The problem statement pertaining to as to how eWOM messages shapes the attitudes towards information acceptance and influences consumer purchase intention is highlighted.

2 Literature Review

2.1 eWOM and Purchase Intention

According to Huang (2013), See-To and Ho (2014), and Zhang et al. (2010), eWOM have a great influence towards online purchase intention, where eWOM could affect the buying decision behaviour of consumers (Wu et al. 2014). Barton (2006) has claimed that eWOM has become great determinants towards consumers' purchase intention neither in companies' website nor shopping websites. Indeed, this can be

explained that eWOM becomes the greatest chance for researchers to identify how influential of eWOM towards purchase intention.

The first study on the influence of eWOM towards purchase intention was carried out by Bickart and Schindler (2001). The study detailed the comparison effect between consumer-generated eWOM and marketers-generated eWOM. The findings posit consumers adopted consumers-generated eWOM as information reference due to the information being more reliable and derived from consumers' experience. Wang et al. (2012), has also found eWOM to have a positive effect towards purchase intention made in social media. In short, eWOM not only influences purchase intention online but influences purchase decision offline too (Matute et al. 2016).

2.2 *Source Credibility*

Cheung and Lee (2012) stated most individuals are likely to make interaction through social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and others. These are some preferable channels where consumers are willing to share information such as review towards products, retailers or services. Besides, individuals are prepared to share their information by using online chat boards in social media (Cheung and Lee 2012).

In general, consumers are more likely to adopt information that is generated by experienced consumers from social media rather than the information generated by the advertisers (Bataineh 2015). Thus, source credibility is seen as another important tool in influencing consumer purchase intention. Therefore, based on the above studies, the first hypothesis is developed to test whether eWOM credibility influence consumer purchase intention.

H1: There is a significant relationship between eWOM credibility and consumer purchase intention.

2.3 *Social Presence*

According to v. Wangenheim and Bayón (2004), consumers will trust the information they obtained through online based on certain factors such as the relationship between the human web interface and intentions to purchase in its specific social presence. This study assumes that human warmth and sociability interaction through the Internet are reinforcing factors with trust that enhance the intention to purchase online. Indeed, the researcher believes that Social Presence represents the social context based on notions of social presence and trust. Thus, the second hypothesis is condensed to test whether social presence influence consumer purchase intention:

H2: There is a significant relationship between social presence and consumer purchase intention.

2.4 *eWOM Quantity*

Cheung and Thadani (2012) claimed the quantity of eWOM makes the reviews more valuable since consumer searches for online reviews. Furthermore, the volume of eWOM represent the popularity of a product in online market. Apart from that, reading numerous reviews by others could reduce consumer fearless when making a purchase decision (Chatterjee 2001). Therefore, the third hypothesis is formulated to investigate the influence of eWOM quantity on consumer purchase intention:

H3: There is a significant relationship between eWOM quantity and consumer purchase intention.

2.5 *eWOM Attractiveness*

The attractiveness of online platform has an impact on purchase intention on social commerce sites but often ignored by many sellers. This can be supported by study from Liang et al. (2011) who claimed consumers will not purchase products from high credibility online sellers due to the inability of the products in fulfilling their desire. Similarly, consumers are more reluctant to pass on a message or content online if the product is not appealing. This means that the viral effect is less likely to occur for such products. However, eWOM attractiveness has a high contribution in social commerce business, due to its high influence towards consumers' purchase intention (See-To and Ho 2014). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is developed to test the influence of eWOM attractiveness on consumer purchase intention.

H4: There is a significant relationship between eWOM attractiveness and consumer purchase intention.

3 Methodology

This research was designed in a cross-sectional and quantitative approach. The target respondents in this research were individual whose age range between 18 to 35 years old and owned at least one social media account in a higher education institution. These respondents were selected based on non-probability method, convenience sampling. 7 points Likert-scale were adopted in this study to identify the respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with the statements in this study.

The researchers successfully obtained 479 out of 600 questionnaires from the target respondents. In the first stage of data filter process, the researchers discarded 11 responses due to incomplete questionnaires filled by the respondents. This is followed by the second stage where the researchers removed 28 sets of questionnaires due to the suspicious response pattern. Therefore, the 440 questionnaires remained, were used in this study. Then, the data was analysed using Smart PLS 3.0 software.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Frequency Analysis

Table 1 showed the demographic profile for the respondents in this study. 76.5% and 24.5% were female and male respondents, respectively. As for the age, majority of the respondents were in the age group of 15–21 years old (79.9%) while 15.8% and 4.3% of respondents were in the age group of 22–27 and 28–35 years old respectively. As for race, Malays were the majority in this study with 79.1% among all respondents.

Most respondents in this study were full-time bachelor's degree program student, from all over the states of Malaysia, with the highest from the Federal Territory with 12.7%, followed by Sabah at 12.3%. In this study, 344 had Facebook while 80 respondents had Instagram accounts. As for product review, apparels, gadgets, and food and beverages are the top three categories that respondents discussed on social network sites. Majority of the respondents in this study get useful information by browsing reviews or comments. Finally, apparel is the most recommended products that would likely to be purchase by respondents in this study.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

As shown in Table 2, all variables were reliable and valid as suggested by Hair et al. (2012) where the average variance extracted (AVE) must not be less than 0.5. While, Henseler et al. (2009) recommended the value for composite reliability (CR) value must be 0.8 and above. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2012) added that the loading values must more than 0.708. However, if the loadings values fall to between 0.4 to 0.7, they are still acceptable since other loadings have high scores of loadings by fulfilling AVE value and CR value criteria. In short, all items in this study were found to be reliable and valid.

Table 1 Respondent’s demographic characteristics

Demographic	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender		
Male	104	23.6
Female	336	76.4
Race		
Malay	420	79.1
Chinese	14	16.4
Indian	6	4.5
Age		
15–21	348	79.1
22–27	72	16.4
28–35	20	4.5
Education		
SPM	27	6.1
Certificate	27	6.1
Diploma	6	1.4
Bachelor’s degree	349	79.3
Master’s degree	2	0.5
Others	29	6.6
Occupation		
Professional staff	39	8.9
Managerial/supporting staff	33	7.5
Part-time student	367	83.4
Full-time students	1	0.2
State		
Kelantan	30	6.8
Terengganu	27	6.1
Pahang	17	3.9
Perak	14	3.2
Penang	28	6.4
Perlis	31	7.0
Kedah	18	4.1
Johor	37	8.4
Negeri Sembilan	23	5.2
Melaka	35	8.0
Selangor	46	10.5
Federal Territory	56	12.7
Sabah	54	12.3

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Demographic	Frequencies	Percentage
Sarawak	24	5.5
Type of social network		
Facebook	344	78.2
Twitter	1	0.2
Instagram	80	18.2
Others	15	3.4
Number of usages for social network		
1–2 times	344	78.2
2–3 times	1	0.2
4–5 times	80	18.2
More than 6 times	15	3.4
Product review		
Gadgets	67	15.22
Food and beverages	57	12.9
Apparel	197	44.7
Shoes	54	12.2
Books	45	10.2
Cosmetics	20	4.5
Purpose of browsing reviews/comments		
To save time	98	22.2
To save money	87	19.7
For convenience	110	25.0
To get useful information	145	32.9
Product recommended		
Gadgets	81	18.5
Food and beverages	71	16.1
Apparel	127	28.9
Shoes	60	13.6
Books	64	14.5
Cosmetics	37	8.4

Table 2 The measurement model analysis result

Constructs	Item	Loading	CR	Ave	Validity
Source credibility	CRE 1	0.567	0.903	0.617	Yes
	CRE 2	0.607			
	CRE 3	0.767			
	CRE 4	0.828			
	CRE 5	0.931			
	CRE 6	0.933			
Source presence	PRE 2	0.862	0.846	0.583	Yes
	PRE 5	0.706			
	PRE 6	0.826			
	PRE 7	0.639			
eWOM quantity	eQuan 2	0.752	0.861	0.601	Yes
	eQuan 4	0.842			
	eQuan 5	0.815			
	eQuan 7	0.707			
eWOM attractiveness	eATTR 1	0.588	0.854	0.601	Yes
	eATTR 3	0.720			
	eATTR 4	0.932			
	eATTR 5	0.820			
Consumer purchase intention	CPI 1	0.745	0.901	0.606	Yes
	CPI 2	0.747			
	CPI 3	0.608			
	CPI 4	0.916			
	CPI 5	0.789			
	CPI 6	0.830			

4.3 Structural Model Assessment

Table 3 showed the hypothesis testing result based on path coefficient test. Hair et al. (2016) suggested the directional hypothesis can be accepted in a research study if the t-value more than 1.96 and a p-value less than 0.05. This signified that all hypotheses in this study were accepted by testing t-value and p-value at the same time.

Table 3 The path coefficient result

Relationship	Hypothesis	Direct effect (β)	Standard error	T-statistic	P-value	Significant
CRE > CPI	H ₁	0.072	0.019	3.884	0.000	Significant
PRE > CPI	H ₂	0.103	0.020	5.246	0.000	Significant
eQUAN > CPI	H ₃	0.114	0.025	4.575	0.000	Significant
eATTR > CPI	H ₄	-0.041	0.015	2.727	0.006	Significant

Note CPI: Consumer Purchase Intention; CRE: Source credibility; PRE: Source presence; eQUAN: eWOM quantity; eATTR: eWOM attractiveness

5 Conclusion, Suggestion and Limitation of the Study

The path coefficient result showed all independent variables are significant towards consumer purchase intention. Firstly, source credibility is significant in influencing consumer purchase intention based on the path coefficient result (β : 0.072, t : 3.884, $p < 0.000$). This finding is supported by the study from Bataineh (2015), where credibility of the source plays a vital role in developing consumer perspective that relates to eWOM. In reality, individual is likely to adopt marketing messages from trusted online platform. This is due to individuals can develop a clear attitude by comparing information from trusted or familiar people and information from advertisers. Therefore, the researchers justify that eWOM is the credibility of the extent to which the consumer feels that the product information, comments or suggestions are facts, true or reliable.

Next, the findings in this study found social presence (β : 0.103, t : 5.246, $p < 0.00$) significantly influences consumer purchase intention. This is supported by study from Lu et al. (2016) who stated that social presence of the web, perception of others, as well as social presence of interaction are three factors for social presence variables. Social presence becomes value-added towards the nature of social aspects in social commerce marketplace based on three determinants. Therefore, the researchers justify that individual who are active users for social networking tools are likely to communicate and interact with other consumers and sociability occur by the web-interface which result in significant result in this study.

Thirdly, eWOM quantity has a significant relationship with consumer purchase intention based on the findings (β : 0.114, t : 4.575, $p < 0.000$). The researchers justify that eWOM quantity can refer as product popularity and consumer purchasing decision can be affect based on the amount or quantity of the eWOM (Hyrnsalmi et al. 2015; Senecal and Nantel 2004). Indeed, the number of reviews and ratings can be determinants towards electronic word-of-mouth and provides positive relationship towards sales which indicated positive eWOM were increasing the sales number (Bataineh 2015).

Last but not least, the findings in this study discovered that eWOM attractiveness (β : -0.041, t : 2.727, $p < 0.006$) significantly influence consumer purchase intention. Teng et al. (2014) defines eWOM attractiveness as individuals who find messages as attractive when many consumers posted familiar or almost similar opinions on online reviews. Thus, this justifies that respondent viewed eWOM attractiveness significantly influence purchase intention. In relation, the online reviews were perceived to be helpful and useful form of information resulted from the attraction of positive online review from past consumers that posted similar messages.

Based on the results of this study, the recommendation for future research is to examine if eWOM is part of other companies' marketing strategies rather than just consumer service companies. In addition, it could be interesting to compare, for example, how consumer service and product companies' eWOM actions differ, or business-to-business' and business-to-consumer's practices vary. Furthermore, differences that online and offline WOM have in their effectiveness should be

researched more thoroughly, as well as how eWOM and WOM could work in collaboration.

For limitations of the study, this study considered all social media websites together instead of specifically focusing on one website such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Further research could examine the eWOM on one social media website. Also, a comparison between social media websites in the context of eWOM can bring valuable theoretical and managerial insights. Care must be taken when extrapolating the findings to other types of online communities. Hence, the knowledge acquired and reported may only be generalised within the perspective of social networking in Malaysia. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised and do not suit the perspective of other online community channels such as blogs, online consumers' reviews, and discussion forums. Third, the data were gathered from young consumers who belonged to the new cohort, i.e., Generation Y. Although the age group of the young generation constitutes most social media users, they may not precisely reflect the whole population. As such, the extent of the knowledge acquired in this study is limited and suited to represent the perspectives of young consumers in online communities. Due to that reason and because they are currently the major generation or cohort which represents an Internet-savvy group, a more diverse sample of potential users in different age categories and professions should be examined in future research.

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