



IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (E-WOM) ON BRAND EXPERIENCE IN THE CASE OF BOTTLED WATER BRANDS

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Abstract

The study presents and empirically tests the conceptual model of the relationship between Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) and Brand Experience dimensions: Sensory, Affective, Behavioral, and Intellectual. Moreover, the research was conducted on respondents who are consumers of bottled water and active users of social media, 318 of them. Furthermore, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was executed to assess the reliability of the scales, while structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to evaluate the projected research hypotheses. The results reveal a significant impact of E-WOM on the Sensory, Affective, Behavioral, and Intellectual dimensions of Brand Experience. The study deepens the knowledge and literature on E-WOM and Brand Experience. Moreover, helps managers in making marketing plans and strategies. Research in other countries, cultures, and industries may yield different results.

Keywords: Electronic Word Of Mouth, E-WOM, Brand Experience, Structural Equation Modeling, SEM, Bottled Water

INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is a ubiquitous tool used by individuals and companies every day. This study offers a model that investigates the relationship between Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) and the Brand Experience dimension. The online world records the growth of active consumers every day. According to We Are Social (2022), there were 4.95 billion active internet users at the start of 2022. The increase in internet users has also led to an incredible increase in the number of social media users, so the use of social media is an everyday thing and 2.95 billion individuals were active social media users globally in 2019. This number is predicted to grow by 2023 to almost 3.43 billion active consumers (Statistica, 2020). Moreover, Social media marketing spending in 2018 is USD 35.98 billion globally (Ajina, 2019; Kusumasondjaja, 2018).

One of the basic characteristics of the online environment is the rapid flow of information, excessive information, and dynamic and rich market space (Helm, 2007; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Simmons, 2008; Yu et al., 2021). It is precisely in this environment that investigates the impact of E-WOM on the Brand Experience of brands bottled water in the market of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This research fills the gap present in the literature when it comes to researching the relationship between E-WOM and Brand Experience, especially in the market of a developing economy, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. Considering that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country known for its clean and untouched nature and its unpolluted potential of water, the research fills a gap in research in this area, and a series of questions are asked about how customers react to the brands of bottled water, and how they perceive these brands on social media. Moreover, data on the use of domestic and foreign water by customers reveals the mutual relationship, because according to the official statistics of the Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the coverage of imports by exports of water is 30% (KomoraBiH, 2021).

The main objective is to investigate the influence of Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the Brand Experience dimensions of bottled water brands in the market of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, the aims to be achieved by this study are:

- Measure and analyze the impact of Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the Sensory Dimension of Brand Experience;
- Measure and analyze the impact of Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the Affective Dimension of Brand Experience
- Measure and analyze the impact of Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the Behavioural Dimension of Brand Experience
- Measure and analyze the impact of Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the Intellectual Dimension

The basic research question is what is the impact of E-WOM on Brand Experience when researching the most popular bottled water brands in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Specific research questions the research focuses on:

- What are the most frequently used social media platforms and water bottled brands in Bosnia and Herzegovina?
- What is the impact of E-WOM on Brand Experience dimensions?

This research provides insight and deepens the literature in the field of social media, more specifically on the impact of E-WOM on Brand Experience, by measuring the impact of E-WOM on each of the dimensions of Brand Experience. Moreover, this research gives insight into how bottled water brands use social media to position themselves in the market of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, the study helps organizations understand the benefits of using social media and justifies investing in creating quality online strategies and plans.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Electronic Word Of Mouth (E-WOM)

To discuss the Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) phenomenon, it is important to point out that it is the digital successor of the Word of mouth (WOM) phenomenon. Evans (2008) identified that Word-of-mouth consumers are generally considered very trustworthy, and Word-of-mouth applies to non-traditional campaigns, which progressively include social media. Moreover, Allsop et al. (2007) state that the success of every company is closely related to building relationships with customers (loyalty, reliability, etc.), and the firm can achieve this relationship through the formation of attitudes and opinions through WOM.

As an online Word Of Mouth phenomenon, Electronic Word Of Mouth (E-WOM) has long been considered a very effective marketing tool, which profiles consumers before ordering products or services in such a way that consumers search the Internet for information left by previous consumers, and all through the information that psychologically eases and solves the anxiety of new consumers (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Pitta & Fowler, 2005; Seo & Park, 2018). Moreover, one of the most important characteristics of E-WOM is its valence, which generally determines the way consumers evaluate the brand (J. Kim & Gupta, 2012; Sijoria et al., 2019).

According to the author's knowledge, the previous literature on E-WOM has widely inspected the characteristics of the valence of E-WOM and has set the interpretation that the negative, positive, neutral, or even mixed valence of E-WOM defines the outcome of E-WOM (de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Sijoria et al., 2019).

Brand Experience

Brand Experience identifies “subjective consumer responses that are evoked by specific brand-related experiential attributes” (Brakus et al., 2009; Zollo et al., 2020). Moreover, Brand Experience contains subjective “sensorial, affective, intellectual, and behavioral” perceptions in consumer brand relations (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010; Zollo et al., 2020). Furthermore, Brand Experience is partly defined by the existence of direct or indirect consumer relationships with the brand (Koay et al., 2020; Sahin et al., 2011), where stimulating social media marketing activities can remind consumers of a brand, gather consumer knowledge, and then encourage affirmative feelings. Also, research by Beig & Khan, (2018) on the example of the social platform Facebook showed that customers have positive brand experiences directed at brands that continuously share content and interact with brand followers through the social media platform (Koay et al., 2020).

As already permeates the literature, Brakus et al. (2009) state dimensions of Brand Experience as “sensory, affective, behavioral dimension, and intellectual dimension” (Zollo et al., 2020).

Sensory Brand Experiences stand for “sensory-perceptual experiences” and frequently luxury brands get sensory experiences to produce “social mystique and aura” (Berthon et al., 2009; Zollo et al., 2020). Moreover, this determines the construction of a strong visual impression on the consumer (Bapat, 2020; Jung & Soo, 2012; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

The second dimension that defines Brand Experience is the Affective Dimension. Moreover, the affective dimension represents the dimension of Brand Experience that presents how strong feelings and emotions the brand evokes in consumers (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014).

The Behavioral Dimension of Brand Experience represents the brand's ability to engage brand consumers in physical activities (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). Moreover, the Behavioral Dimension primarily refers to a lifestyle, bodily experiences, and interaction with the brand (Bapat, 2020; Jung & Soo, 2012; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

The Intellectual Dimension of Brand Experience refers to the level of stimulation of thinking, consumer curiosity, and problem-solving that the brand causes (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). Moreover, intellectual experiences can be called events that activate consumers' thoughts and stimulate their curiosity (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020; Schmitt, 1999).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

The way of researching the relationship between E-WOM and Brand Experience in the previous literature can be viewed in two ways, so the first way of studying the relationship between the two phenomena is when E-WOM was viewed as part of Social media marketing

activities (SMMA) and its relationship was investigated integrally with other SMMA constructs contrasted with Brand Experience, and the second research approach, as far as the authors know, was a direct way of researching the relationship of E-WOM as an independent construct to Brand Experience.

In the literature, as far as the authors are aware, it is found that E-WOM has been investigated as part of SMMA and investigated with Brand Experience in different studies in the fields of banking, cosmetics, and fashion in different countries Pakistan, Malaysia, and China (Awali & Astuti, 2021; Chen & Qasim, 2021; Koay et al., 2020; Orten Tugrul, 2014; Simon et al., 2013; Zollo et al., 2020).

The second approach that is present in the literature refers to the study of the relationship between independent E WOM and Brand Experience and as such is significant in the studies of fashion, fast food, smartphones in Bangladesh, and Pakistan (Farzin et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2021; Rahman & Mannan, 2018; Sijoria et al., 2019).

Jones et al. (2009) proves the connection between personal experience and WOM in its research on Internet commerce. Moreover, Palmer, (2010) believed that brands can benefit significantly from E-WOM by providing users with personalized brand experiences. Moreover, instead of flash retail and pop-up stores, brands should focus on providing a better brand experience by encouraging E-WOM (Sahin et al., 2011).

The connection between Brand Experience and E-WOM was investigated by Almohaimmeed (2020) in the case of Arabic restaurants, where he presented that the 3 of 4 dimensions of Brand Experience influence E-WOM. Moreover, the results of Almohaimmeed's (2020) research showed that emotional, sensory, and behavioral Brand Experience influences E-WOM, while Intellectual Brand Experience had no significant impact on E-WOM.

This study deepens and enriches the literature by investigating the direct impact of E-WOM and Brand Experience, by investigating the impact of E-WOM on each of the dimensions of Brand Experience, as shown in Figure 1.

After all the above, it can be hypothesized:

H1: E- Word Of Mouth has a positive influence on Sensory Dimension

H2: E- Word Of Mouth has a positive influence on Affective Dimension

H3: E- Word Of Mouth has a positive influence on Behavioral Dimension

H4: E- Word Of Mouth has a positive influence on the Intellectual Dimension

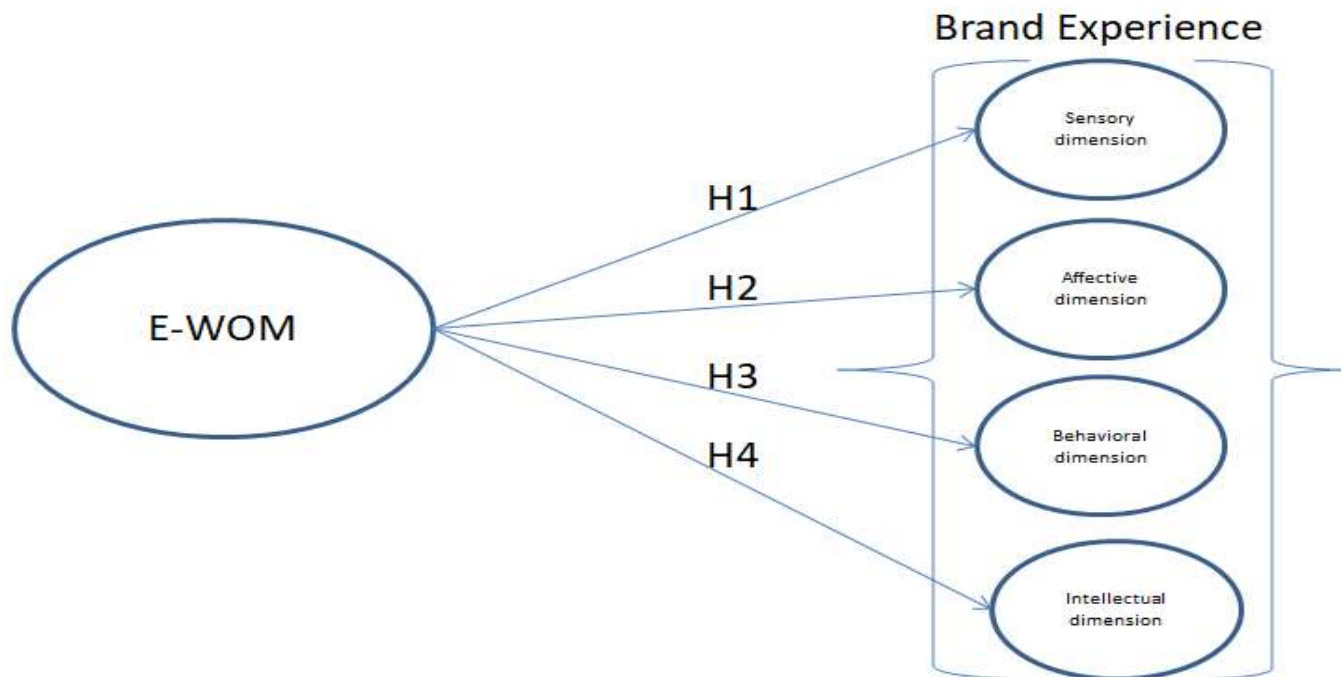


Figure 1. Proposed model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a descriptive research design. Participants in this research are individuals living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who consume one of the offered brands of bottled water and are active users of social media. Moreover, the study is quantitative research with a probability sampling method. The questionnaire was distributed online via social media platforms. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, in the first part the respondents answered their socio-geographical characteristics, in the second part they answered questions about social media, and in the third part, they answered questions about E-WOM and Brand Experience phenomenon. Moreover, respondents, when choosing one of the offered brands of bottled water Oaza, Olimpija, Jana, Prolom, Lejla, and Vitinka answered questions about E-WOM and Brand Experience associated with that brand. The three domestic brands were Lejla, Oaza, and Vitinka, while the foreign ones were Jana, Olimpija, and Prolom. Before distribution, the questionnaire was translated from English to Bosnian and presented to a small group of participants in the test phase (Innovation Barometer, 2021). Moreover, the proposed items in the survey were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with the same anchors in the range of (1) = Strongly disagree to (5) = Strongly agree (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Zollo et al., 2020). The data was collected at the beginning of 2022. 325 responses were collected, of which 318 were valid. This research used SPSS and AMOS software to assess and measure the results.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The results of the research are presented in tables: Individual characteristics of the respondents (Table 1.), Information about social media and brands (Table 2.), Reliability and validity test results of the measurement model (Table 3.), EFA Analysis (Table 4.), Model fit indices (Table 5.), Summary of SEM results (Table 6.), as well as figures: CFA analysis (Figure 2.), SEM model (Figure 3.).

Table 1 presents individual characteristic data on respondents. There were 318 valid answers from respondents, of which 173 were females and 145 were males. The respondents were from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, most of them from Sarajevo, 238 of them. Respondents of different age groups took part in the research, and most of them were between 18-30, or 38.7%.

Table 1. Individual characteristics of the respondents

Gender		
Male	145	46%
Female	173	54%
Age		
18-30	123	38.7%
31-40	122	38.4%
41-50	48	15.1%
51-60	22	6.9%
Over 60	3	0.9%
City		
Sarajevo	238	74.8%
Ilidža	13	4.1%
Mostar	11	3.5%
Zenica	8	2.5%
Konjic	7	2.2%
Tuzla	7	2.2%
Breza	5	5.2%
Livno	4	1.3%
Brčko	3	0.9%
Rest of B&H	22	6.9%

Table 2 shows the data provided by the respondents on the use of social media and bottled water brands. The results show that the majority of respondents, 284 or 89.3%, use

social media daily, the most frequently used social media platform is Facebook, which 148 respondents said they use most often. Moreover, The most frequently used brand of bottled water according to respondents' responses is Oaza, chosen by 106 respondents or 33.3% of them, followed by Lejla with 22 % and Olimpija with 21.1%.

Table 2. Information about social media and brands

Frequency of social media use		
Daily	284	89.3%
Weekly	6	1.9%
Monthly	0	0.0%
Every 3 months	0	0.0%
By need	28	8.8%
The most commonly used social media platform		
Facebook	148	46.5%
Instagram	125	39.3%
LinkedIn	2	0.6%
YouTube	39	12.3%
Twitter	4	1.3%
The most commonly consumed brand of bottled water		
Jana	52	16.4%
Olimpija	67	21.1%
Oaza	106	33.3%
Prolom	19	6.0%
Lejla	70	22.0%
Vitinka	4	1.3%

Table 3 shows the results of the reliability and validity analysis. Factor reliability verification was evaluated using Cronbach alpha. Moreover, Nunnally (1978) suggested that a group of objects whose Cronbach's alpha has a coefficient larger than 0.7 can be considered internal consistency (Hadziahmetovic & Dinc, 2020). The results of the Chronbach alpha value revealed that the factor for E-WOM has a value of 0.837, while Brand Experience has a value of 0.893 which means that all factors are highly reliable, which ultimately implies that the reliability of the model is very good.

Validity measurement was performed via the AMOS Plugin (Gaskin et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2015; Hu & Bentler, 1999) The analyzed results, in Table 3., illustrate that all constructs have composite reliability greater than (CR)> 0.7, ranging from 0.760 to

0.879, and that indicates internal consistency (Gefen et al., 2000; Koay et al., 2020; Prasetyo et al., 2020). Reflective: all average extracted variance (AVE) > 0,5 indicates convergent reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Koay et al., 2020) It is particularly important to consider the link between maximum total variance (MSV) and average extracted variance (AVE). To calculate discriminant validity, MSV and AVE values were compared, while all AVE values were higher than MSV values and the square root of AVE had a higher value than correlation values for each factor. The above values confirm the discriminatory validity of the extracted factor structure (Hadziahmetovic & Dinc, 2020).

Table 3. Reliability and validity test results of the measurement model

Constructs		Source	Reliability (Cronbach alpha)	CR	AVE	MSV
Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)		(A. J. Kim & Ko, 2010) (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2012) (Godey et al., 2016) (Cheung et al., 2019) (Zollo et al., 2020)	0.837	0.838	0.722	0.354
Brand	Sensory Dimension	(Brakus et al., 2009)	0.893	0.845	0.731	0.512
Experience	Affective Dimension	(Koay et al., 2020)		0.791	0.654	0.546
	Behavioural Dimension	(Zollo et al., 2020)		0.879	0.784	0.529
	Intellectual Dimension			0.760	0.614	0.546

Note(s):

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) >0.7,

Composite reliability (CR) >0.7

Average variance extracted (AVE) >0.5

AVE > MSV

Analyzing further results, Table 4 shows the values of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) which was performed in SPSS software with maximum likelihood extraction with Promax rotation to determine the factor loading of each item on the constructs. Moreover, (Hadziahmetovic & Dinc, 2020), Hair (1998) offers factor load assessment. (Hair, 1998) proposed using 0.3 load levels as the minimum load factor, and his criterion was used for 318 samples. During the EFA analysis, 4 items of Brand Experience were deleted.

Table 4. EFA Analysis

Pattern Matrix(a)		
	Factor	
	1	2
E_WOM_1		0.871
E_WOM_2		0.822
BESD_1	0.674	
BESD_2	0.696	
BEAD_1	0.652	
BEAD_3	0.743	
BEBD_1	0.861	
BEBD_2	0.841	
BEID_1	0.492	
BEID_3	0.595	

Figure 2 presents the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which tested the validity of the proposed. Moreover, the CFA analysis was done in AMOS software. The model contains all the constructs of the proposed model E-WOM, Brand Experience (Sensory Dimension, Affective Dimension, Behavioural Dimension, and Intellectual Dimension). Furthermore, the results of the CFA analysis provided answers as to whether the number of factors and the values of the loadings of the measured objects on the factors confirm that the proposed factor structure corresponds to the hypothesized model.

First, CFA checks the model fit, and this research used several indexes that indicate this, namely, the chi-square fit index, GFI (goodness-of-fit) index (Hadziahmetovic & Dinc, 2020; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989); TLI (Tucker Lewis Index) (Hadziahmetovic & Dinc, 2020; Tucker & Lewis, 1973); CFI (Comparative fit index) (Bentler, 1990); RM-SEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) (Bollen, 1989; Hadziahmetovic & Dinc, 2020); IFI (Incremental Fit Index), and NFI (Normed Fit Index) (Hadziahmetovic & Dinc, 2020; Hooper et al., 2008). For the proposed model, the CFA analysis values were within the acceptable range: Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)=1.466; GFI=0.979; TLI=0.988; CFI=0.993; RMSEA=0.038, IFI=0.993; NFI=0.979. All of the above implies an excellent model fit. Moreover, during the analysis, AMOS software performed 9 iterations to achieve model minimization.

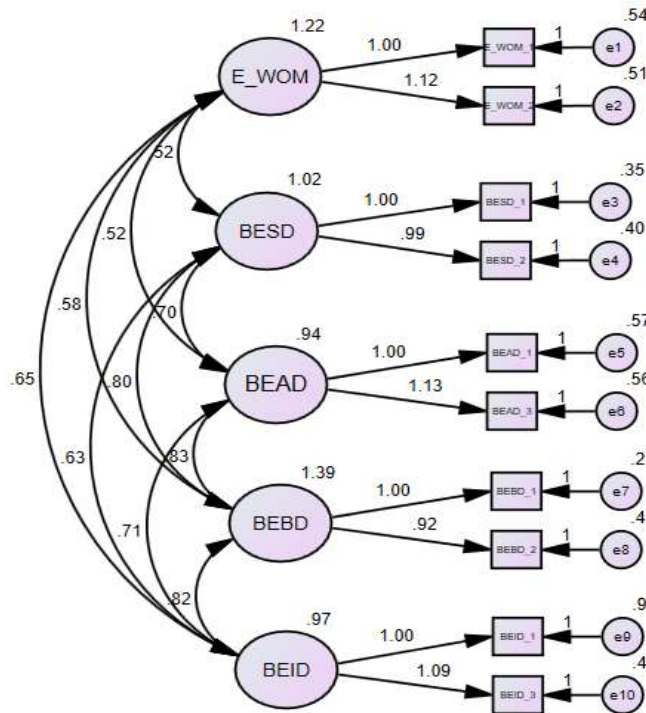


Figure 2. CFA analysis

The proposed conceptual model with hypotheses was tested by modeling structural equations (SEM). Moreover, SEM (Figure 3.) is presented direct links between E-WOM and Brand Experience dimensions (Sensory Dimension, Affective Dimension, Behavioural Dimension, and Intellectual Dimension). Moreover, the influence of E-WOM on each of the dimensions was examined. Analyzes were performed in AMOS software.

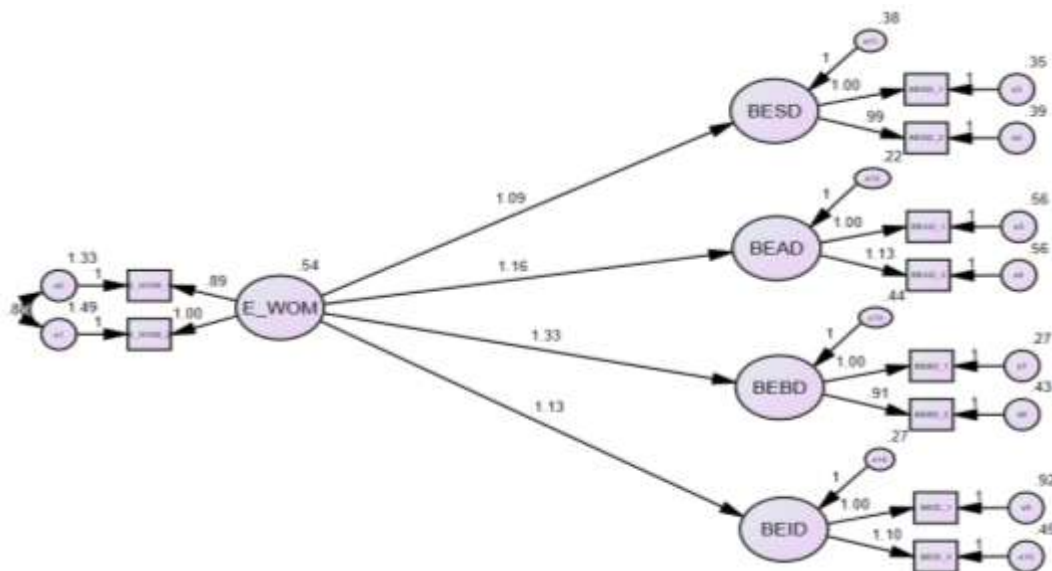


Figure 3. SEM model

Table 5 Demonstrate the model fit index during SEM analysis with acceptable values of each index. After the analysis, acceptable results were found, and an adequate level of fit with $\chi^2 / df = 1.546$, $p = .029$, AGFI = 0.950, GFI = 0.972, NFI = 0.973, IFI = 0.990, RMSEA = 0.041 and CFI = 0.990.

Table 5. Model fit indices

Fit Indices	Acceptable Range	Measured Values
p-value of the model	>0.05	0.029
Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)	<3	1.546
Goodness-of-fit (GFI)	>0.9	0.972
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	>0.9	0.990
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	>0.9	0.985
Root Means-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	>0.05	0.041
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	>0.9	0.990
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	>0.9	0.973

Table 6 shows the results of the hypothesis testing of the model, Examining the path estimates, the hypotheses were supported by critical values less than $p < 0.05$. Hypothesis 1 (H1) is supported with p-value = 0.000 implying that there is a significant positive impact of E-WOM on the Sensory Dimension of Brand Experience. Hypothesis 2 (H2) is supported with a p-value=0.000, suggesting that E-WOM has a positive influence on Affective Dimension. Moreover, Hypothesis 3 (H3) was supported, which indicates that E-WOM has an impact on the Behavioural Dimension of Brand Experience. Accordingly, the results provide support also for Hypothesis 4 (H4), such that E-WOM have a positive impact on the Intellectual Dimension of Brand Experience, with a p-value =0.000.

Table 6. Summary of SEM results

	Hypothesis	Estimate	Sig	
H1	E-WOM → Sensory Dimension	1.093	***	Supported
H2	E-WOM → Affective Dimension	1.160	***	Supported
H3	E-WOM → Behavioural Dimension	1.327	***	Supported
H4	E-WOM → Intellectual Dimension	1.130	***	Supported

The study revealed that there is a significant impact of E-WOM on Brand Experience, through significantly positive impacts that E-WOM has on Brand Experience dimensions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study offers insight into the relationship between E-WOM and Brand Experience, by measuring and analyzing the impact of E-WOM on the Sensory, Behavioral, Affective, and Intellectual dimensions of Brand Experience. It has been hypothesized that E-WOM has a significantly positive impact on the Sensory, Behavioral, Affective, and Intellectual Dimensions of Brand Experience. Moreover, these results provide a deep insight into the relationship of constructs, giving the possibility of theoretical and practical applications.

Theoretical implications

As much as there are many studies investigating E-WOM, as far as the authors are aware, there is a gap when it comes to researching the discrete impact of E-WOM on Brand Experience. The research results contribute to the growth of adequate literature on E-WOM and Brand Experience phenomena. The research results prove that Sensory Affective, Behavioral, and Intellectual dimensions are positive predictors of Brand Experience. As already shown by Zollo et al. (2020) and Koay et al. (2020) research, the results of this study also confirmed that there is a significant direct impact of E-WOM on Brand Experience. Moreover, this study deepens these findings by providing direct insight into the relationship of E-WOM with each dimension of Brand Experience individually. Yu et al. (2021) in their study, find a significant mediating role that E-WOM has towards the Brand Experience, while this study also shows the direct impact of E-WOM on each of the dimensions of the Brand Experience. When Almohaimmed (2020) investigated the influence of Brand Experience on E-WOM and proved that the three dimensions of Brand Experience (sensory, emotional, and behavioral) influence E-WOM, while the Intellectual dimension of Brand Experience did not significantly influence E-WOM. In contrast to his research, the results of this study, whose model was set up to investigate the impact of E-WOM on Brand Experience dimensions, show that E-WOM has a significant positive effect on all 4 dimensions of Brand Experience (Sensory Affective, Behavioral, and Intellectual). By researching the phenomena of E-WOM and Brand Experience, in this way, academics are allowed to gain insight into the structure of E-WOM, Brand Experience, and their mutual relationship, and they are encouraged to do some new research that will continue to deepen the studied phenomena.

Managerial implications

Managers and executives can use the results of this study as a basis for creating marketing plans and strategies that include a better online experience with their brand. The results showed that Facebook and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms and

that the most used bottled waters are Oaza and Lejla. This data will help managers to include social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram in their strategies and plans, and create quality online campaigns based on that. Moreover, consumers preferred domestic brands of bottled water in the market of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and this information can be used in the way and modality of presenting brands to customers. The results give a signal that E-WOM can improve the Brand Experience through the sensory, behavioral, intellectual, and affective senses of the consumer. Such knowledge gives the possibility to brands and their managers that by improving the interaction with customers through E-WOM, they can raise the customer's Brand Experience. Moreover, the study raises managers' awareness of the importance of E-WOM for their brand. Furthermore, bottled water brands that use their online sites for promotion should actively involve various online consumer communities, which through their members and E-WOM they produce strengthen the Brand Experience. If the brand creates sufficiently interesting content, customers will pass it on to their friends and in this way create E-WOM, which will further influence the customer's better experience with the brand.

Limitations and future research

The study provides a basis for further research in other regions, and cultures, as well as in other industries. The obtained results should be a motivation for other researchers to investigate the model in other industries, countries, and consumer cultures. Moreover, results in a different type of economic space, a different culture, and other brands may produce different results. Furthermore, this study has a relatively small sample of respondents, so a larger sample size would help strengthen the study findings.

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