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ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH INFLUENCES ON PURCHASE INTENTIONS OF FEMALE CONSUMERS IN SAUDI ARABIA: MEDIATING ROLE OF CONSUMER TRUST

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Abstract

The study rigorously investigated the influence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on the purchase intentions of female consumers, with particular focus on the mediating role of trust in Saudi Arabia. Empirical data were obtained from a sample of 360 female respondents through a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale. The survey instrument was disseminated via established WhatsApp groups to ensure targeted participants were reached. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a robust technique suitable for examining complex causal relationships. The findings revealed that all four proposed hypotheses were statistically supported. Specifically, eWOM exhibited a significant direct effect on consumers' purchase intentions, while trust served as a critical mediator in this relationship. In light of these results, organizations are encouraged to strategically promote eWOM initiatives to strengthen consumer trust and ultimately enhance purchasing behavior.

Keywords: eWOM, purchase intention, female customers, trust, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

The continued evolution and widespread use of internet in the recent decades have contributed to a considerable growth in online users, resulting in significant changes across various industries (Zainal, Harun, & Lily, 2017). The rise of social media has led to the emergence of a digital form of word-of-mouth communication known as Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). 'Word of Mouth' (WOM) has long been utilized across multiple industries worldwide in disseminating information about products and services, (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016) (Bulut & Karabulut, 2018) (Jacobsen, 2018). Word of mouth (WOM) refers to the informal exchange of information in which consumers share their experiences, opinions, or evaluations of products and services with friends, family, and acquaintances. In the contemporary business environment, organizations across diverse sectors increasingly rely on social media to interact with current and potential customers (Zainal, Harun, & Lily, 2017). With the rapid growth of the Internet and social media platforms, however, WOM has evolved from a predominantly offline phenomenon into a digital form of communication with a broader audience and greater influence (Jha, 2019).

The growth of digital technologies has enabled consumers to share product-related experiences and opinions with a broader audience, fostering the rise of eWOM. (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004) defined eWOM communication as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet." Blogs, social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter), online forums, and review websites have emerged as prominent channels for the creation and dissemination of eWOM (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Jacobsen, 2018).

A substantial body of research has shown that reference groups are among the primary influences shaping consumer purchasing behavior (Engel et al., 1993; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010; Solomon, 1994). Moreover, when deciding about a purchase, consumers typically undergo several cognitive and behavioral processes (Kim et al., 2011; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Zainal et al., 2017). Studies indicate that whereas consumers once relied primarily on advertising and other traditional, non-digital platforms, they are now increasingly basing their purchase decisions on online reviews (Lee et al., 2008). Today, consumers rely heavily on various online platforms to gather information, making this step an essential component of the overall decision-making process (Teng et al., 2014; Zhu & Zhang, 2010).

Although social media contains both genuine and misleading reviews, positive online feedback can play a significant role in building consumer trust in products and vendors (Bulut & Karabulut, 2018). Trust, in turn, reduces perceived risk among consumers (Handi et al., 2018;

Harridge-March, 2006), ultimately enhancing their purchase intentions (Bulut & Karabulut, 2018; Fang et al., 2014; Limbu Yam et al., 2012; Seo et al., 2020). Therefore, trust in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) including comments, reviews, and even website information—can positively influence consumers' perceptions and may serve as a mediating factor in shaping their buying intentions (Lu et al., 2010; Seo et al., 2020; Zainal et al., 2017). While several researchers, such as Seo et al. (2020), Ayeh et al., (2013), and Abubakar and Ilkan (2016), have examined the relationship between eWOM and consumer purchase intentions, only a limited number of studies have considered trust as a mediating variable. Furthermore, most existing research has focused on specific industries such as airlines, clothing, or tourism. This study aims to investigate the overall impact of eWOM on consumer purchase intentions and, more specifically, to explore the mediating role of trust in this relationship from a cross-industry perspective. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for marketing strategists seeking to develop more effective online communication strategies, while also contributing to academic literature by applying Social Exchange Theory (SET) to explain the eWOM phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

eWOM and Consumers' Purchase Intention

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is a dynamic digital mechanism through which individuals share product-related experiences and evaluations on online platforms. It has emerged as a cornerstone of modern marketing due to its scalability, interactivity, and consumer-driven nature (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) emphasized that eWOM reduces consumers' cognitive effort, thereby supporting more satisfying purchasing decisions. Consumers are particularly drawn to eWOM for its ability to shorten decision-making time and improve purchase outcomes. Moreover, eWOM serves as an effective medium for exchanging information with large audiences across both online and offline channels (Hung & Li, 2007; Karakaya & Ganim Barnes, 2010). Its adaptability, diverse user base, and cost-effectiveness have further established it as a strategic priority in contemporary marketing practices (Babić Rosario et al., 2020; Seo et al., 2020; Zainal et al., 2017). Recent studies reaffirm the significance of eWOM in influencing consumer behavior. Mudaim and Dirgiatmo (2024) demonstrated that both the quality and credibility of eWOM significantly shape purchase intentions, particularly when mediated by perceived usefulness. Cuong (2024) reported that perceived risk moderates this relationship, where higher levels of perceived risk diminish the effect of eWOM. Similarly, Roy et al. (2024) confirmed the influence of eWOM across diverse

online services, showing that it not only affects consumer attitudes but also their evaluations and decision-making processes.

As more consumers share their post-purchase experiences online, eWOM became increasingly influential in shaping the choices of potential buyers (Gruen et al., 2006; Roy et al., 2020). Several factors drive this process, including pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In this sense, eWOM functions as an informational filter through which consumers evaluate value propositions (Abubakar et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2017; Bronner & de Hoog, 2011). Scholars such as Erkan and Evans (2016) and Babić Rosario et al., (2020) highlighted that the trustworthiness of the information source and the richness of the content enhance user engagement and increase purchase likelihood. Likewise, Cheung and Thadani (2012) emphasized that message credibility and source characteristics jointly determine the adoption of eWOM. Based on these insights from prior literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: eWOM has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention.

eWOM and Trust

Trust is not merely a byproduct of successful transactions, it is also cultivated during the pre-purchase stage, particularly through the perceived credibility and informativeness of eWOM. Prior research has consistently demonstrated that eWOM contributes to building consumer trust in digital environments. Cheung, Lee, and Rabjohn (2009) found that the consistency and volume of eWOM messages significantly enhance trust formation, especially when content originates from multiple independent and unbiased sources. Similarly, Hajli et al., (2014) emphasized that active participation in online communities reinforces trust, as consumers collectively validate claims through shared experiences and dialogue. Fang et. Al., (2018), highlighted the importance of user-generated content in trust-building, particularly for high-involvement products where decision-making is more complex. Yang et. al., (2023) demonstrated that sharing eWOM enhances trust in the source, which in turn strengthens consumers' purchase decisions. Lee et al. (2023) confirmed that personalized and relevant eWOM content on social networking platforms fosters relational trust between message senders and receivers. Consistent with these findings, Shafiq et al., (2023) reported that eWOM reduces perceived risk in online retail environments, thereby strengthening trust in both the product and the seller. Maru and Vijay (2024), in a systematic review, identified credibility and authenticity as central determinants of eWOM driven brand trust in digital contexts. AlHalbusi and Tehseen (2018), highlighted that message clarity and emotional tone significantly influence brand image and trust, particularly in service industries. Kang and Namkung (2019) found that eWOM quality

measured in terms of accuracy and completeness positively affects consumers' trust in online reviews. In the context of influencer marketing, Zurine and Tugiman (2022) demonstrated that perceived credibility and expertise of influencers strongly shape trust and subsequent purchase decisions. Kooli et al., (2021) showed that source expertise and platform design jointly influence eWOM effectiveness and trust perceptions, particularly in mobile commerce environments. These studies underscore that when eWOM is perceived as credible, relevant, and consistent, it serves as a critical antecedent to consumer trust in digital marketing contexts. Based on these insights from prior literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: eWOM has a positive influence on consumer trust.

Trust and Buying Intention

Trust plays a pivotal role in shaping online consumer behavior, particularly in digital environments where physical product inspection and face-to-face interaction are absent. In regions such as the Arab world including Saudi Arabia trust is often considered a critical factor due to concerns over product authenticity, data privacy, and transactional transparency. Everard and Galletta (2005) argue that trust mitigates uncertainty and enhances consumer confidence, thereby facilitating both information disclosure and purchase commitment. As a psychological construct, trust influences not only consumer interactions with vendors but also the way individuals interpret marketing messages and brand promises. Zainal et al., (2017) positioned trust as a central belief within the belief–attitude–intention framework, demonstrating that higher levels of trust improve decision-making efficiency and confidence. Similarly, Esch et al., (2006) emphasized that brand trust fosters emotional connections with consumers, thereby increasing both initial purchases and long-term brand loyalty. In the context of social commerce where peer-generated content dominates trust becomes even more essential (Featherman & Hajli, 2016).

Empirical studies have identified trust as both an antecedent and a consequence of eWOM exposure. Kuan and Bock (2007) revealed that trust can transfer between physical and online retail settings, influencing consumer behavioral intent across platforms. Khwaja, Zaman, and Anwar (2020) further demonstrated that predispositional trust, when combined with information adoption, significantly shapes consumer decisions in digital marketplaces. Bulsara and Vaghela (2023) found that trust directed toward either the seller or the website plays a critical role in determining consumers' willingness to engage in high-risk digital transactions. Supporting these findings, Kurniasari**,** et al. (2022) integrated trust into the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), showing that perceived trustworthiness enhances both user acceptance and engagement in online platforms. In mobile commerce, Wasiq et al., (2023) found

that trust reduces perceived risk and facilitates transaction completion. In the emerging context of live-streaming commerce, Chen, Lu, and Wang (2023), demonstrated that trust in both the streamer and the platform significantly increases consumers' purchase likelihood. Wistedt (2024) also emphasized that in cross-border e-commerce, perceived trustworthiness fosters consumer commitment, leading to higher purchase intentions. Recent studies have broadened the scope of trust in digital commerce. AlFarraj (2021) confirmed that trust in AI-driven recommendation systems positively influences consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Collectively, these findings affirm that trust is a cornerstone of online consumer behavior and remains one of the most consistent and influential predictors of purchase intention across diverse digital commerce contexts, from traditional e-commerce to social and mobile platforms.

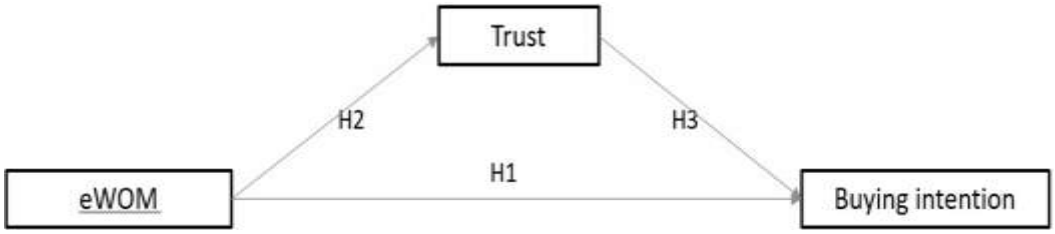
H3: Trust has a positive influence on customers' purchase intention.

Mediating role of trust between eWOM and Purchase Intention

Recent empirical studies reaffirm the importance of trust in the eWOM. For instance, Patel et. al., (2024) demonstrated that trust in eWOM reviewers significantly predicts purchase intention and mediates the influence of message credibility. This finding is consistent with earlier research by Ismagilova et al., (2020) and Kuan and Bock (2007), who showed that trust operates both as an outcome of eWOM exposure and as a driver of behavioral intentions. Erkan and Evans (2016) further highlighted that trust in the information source is a key determinant of eWOM effectiveness, while Khwaja et al., (2020) found that trust disposition and information adoption sequentially shape consumer decision-making.

The mediating role of trust has also been validated through advanced modeling approaches. Roy et al. (2024), using structural equation modeling (SEM), confirmed that trust significantly enhances the adoption of eWOM, particularly in service-oriented industries. Similarly, Patel et. al., (2024) identified brand reputation and trust in online reviews as strong predictors of consumer purchase behavior, underscoring the centrality of trust as a mediator. Beyond its direct influence on purchase intention, trust also reduces perceived risk—another critical determinant of online consumer behavior. Studies by Abubakar and Ilkan (2016), Chiu et al. (2012), Han and Hyun (2013), and Abubakar et al. (2017) collectively demonstrate that reduced perceived risk, facilitated by trust, increases consumer engagement and purchasing likelihood. In this way, positive eWOM not only shapes attitudes but also encourages favorable purchase decisions, as trust enables consumers to process product-related information more confidently and make informed choices under uncertainty (Lin & Lu, 2010). Based on these evidences, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Trust mediates the relationship between eWOM and customers' purchase intention.



H4 – trust mediates between eWOM and buying intentions

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

The Study

To achieve research objectives this study used quantitative methods to examine relationships between variables by collecting and analyzing the survey data to test the hypotheses.

Sampling and Data Collection

The population comprises of all female online shoppers residing in Saudi Arabia. However, due to non-existence of list of female online shoppers, it was not possible to select the sampling elements from the population directly. Hence, a non-probabilistic sampling procedure – convenience sampling was used to collect data. Data were collected through an online questionnaire designed in Arabic and administered via Google Forms. The survey link was distributed using WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, and emails. A total of 280 responses were obtained, which exceeds the benchmark of 250 responses suggested by Kristensen and Eskildsen (2010) for achieving appropriate results in studies related to customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire of the current study was divided into two sections. The first section contained questions regarding respondents' demographic characteristics. The second section contained questions pertaining to the construct items, selected to measure each variable based on existing measures adapted from similar scales (see table 1). All items were measured using a 5 point Likert scale, with 5 being "Strongly Agree" and 1 "Strongly Disagree". Based on the proposed model of the study, the questionnaire comprised of three main constructs namely, Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Trust and Buying Intention. All measurement items were adapted from Mahmud et. al. (2024). The questionnaire was initially developed in English and subsequently translated into Arabic—the official language of Saudi Arabia—to ensure clarity, accuracy, and ease of comprehension for the target respondents.

Table 1: Measurement Items

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)	eWOM-1	I read/watch online reviews before purchasing a product
	eWOM-2	I always care about the experience of other users who used the product earlier
	eWOM-3	Before making a purchasing decision of a product, I even try to chat or talk with a reviewer regarding the product
	eWOM-4	I frequently gather information about different products online to enrich my knowledge
	eWOM-5	I feel indecisive or discomfort if I do not read/watch online reviews of other users
Trust	TRUST_1	When I shop for a product, online reviews on social media or webpages make me confident to purchase the product
	TRUST_2	I prefer online review more than a brand for my purchasing decision
	TRUST_3	Reviewers' ratings of the user affect my purchasing decision
	TRUST_4	I believe that product reviews on the Internet are true and accurate
Buying intention (BI)	BI_1	While buying a product, the positive or negative online reviews affect my buying decision
	BI_2	In my future purchase, I will always give priority to online reviews
	BI_3	After purchasing and using a product, I will also leave my review/feedback online, so that potential buyers can learn about the product

Source: Md. Shahed Mahmud, Md. Nazmul Islam, Md. Rostam Ali and Nadia Mehjabin. (2020)

Data analysis

This study is quantitative in nature, Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), using the Smart PLS 4.0 programme (Ringle et al., 2005) has been used for data analysis. PLS-SEM is appropriate for such kind of study as it can effectively handle small sample sizes and non-normal data distributions (Hair et al., 2014). It is especially suitable when the research aims to test existing theories while accommodating complex model structures (Ringle et al., 2018; Fernandes and Castro, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents Profile

In line with the study objectives all the 280 respondents were females living in Saudi Arabia. Table 2 shows that 36.7% respondents were aged between 18 years to 35 years, who are from Gen Z and Millennials, 33.3% respondents were aged between 36 to 50 years and 30% respondents are above 50 years. Another important enquiry regarding the respondents' average time spent on social media revealed that more than 67% respondents spent 3 to 8 hours daily on social media, 23.5% users spend more than 8 hours daily on social media. Only

20.7% said that they spent 1 to 2 hours on social media. The results show that the females in Saudi Arabia spent enough time and are very active on social media.

Table 2: Respondents' profile and Social media time spent

Variable	Attribute	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	280	100%
Age Range	18–35 years	102	36.7%
	36–50 years	95	33.3%
	51– and above	83	30.0%
Average time spent in social media (daily)	1–2 hours	58	20.7%
	3–5 hours	124	44.3%
	6–8 hours	66	23.5%
	More than 8 hours	32	11.5%

Measurement Model Assessment

Measurement model was accessed by checking the convergent validity, composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha and AVE (average variance extracted). Table 3 highlights Cronbach alpha values as exceeding 0.7, which suggests constructs are reliable (Nunnnally, 1978). The composite reliability values are above the minimum boundary criterion of 0.7 (Chin, 1998). The AVE was also greater than the 0.5 permissible boundary, suggesting evidence for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, this suggests that indicators were explanatory for the latent construct (Hair et al., 2006). The statements with loadings less than 0.5, were delete. Item eWOM1 and eWOM3 were deleted from the eWOM construct for having loadings less than 0.5, as well as item B-Intention3 was deleted for the same reason.

Construct Reliability, Validity and factor loadings

Table 3: Factor Loadings, Cronbach alpha, Construct Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho-A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
eWOM	eWOM_2	0.724	0.513	0.575	0.746	0.503
	eWOM_4	0.525				
	eWOM_5	0.842				

Trust	TRUST_1	0.835	0.797	0.812	0.868	0.624
	TRUST_2	0.737				
	TRUST_3	0.860				
	TRUST_4	0.717				
Buying Intention	B-Intention_1	0.874	0.700	0.700	0.869	0.769
	B-Intention_2	0.880				

Table 3…

Discriminant Validity

Next, the discriminant validity of the measures was accessed. Discriminant validity is the extent to which measures are not reflection of some other variable and is specified by lower correlations between measures of interest (Cheung and Lee, 2010). According to Fornell and Larker (1981), discriminant validity can be accessed by comparing the squared correlations between construct and AVE for a construct. Table 4 highlights that the squared root of the AVE is less than the off-diagonal elements in the corresponding row and column of the correlation tables suggesting evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 4: Fornell and Larker - Discriminant Validity

	Buying Intention-	**Trust-**	**eWOM-**
Buying Intention-	0.877		
Trust-	0.780	0.790	
eWOM-	0.534	0.581	0.709

Model Fit

The model fit indices were tested. The root-mean squared residual (SRMR) is defined as the difference between the observed correlation and the model correlation (85). The ideal SRMR value is below 0.08 (Hair et al., 2019, 2022), however a value below 0.1 is acceptable (Kock, 2020). The SRMR value as indicated in Table 5, is 0.092, which is acceptable value for the model fitness.

Table 5: Model Fit Index

	Saturated model	**Estimated model**
SRMR	0.092	0.092
d_ULS	0.379	0.379
d_G	0.168	0.168
Chi-square	289.473	289.473
NFI	0.695	0.695

Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis testing

Bootstrapping procedure was used with 5000 samples, testing path values (Ringle et al., 2015). The standardized path coefficients and significance levels provide evidence of the models' quality (75), and allow the researchers to test the proposed hypotheses. The path coefficients and significance levels are illustrated in figure 1 and Table 6. The effects of the independent constructs on the dependent ones were examined since they provide practitioners with actionable results regarding cause-effect relationships. Figure 1, shows the main predictors of dependent variable of customer's buying intention. Regarding hypothesis testing, Table 6 shows combined effects of path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values. The results indicate that all the three hypothesis are statistically significant indicating their impact on dependent variable. The R^2 value in the model shows that the independent variables (eWOM and Trust) explained 61.8% of the dependent variable (Customers' buying intention).

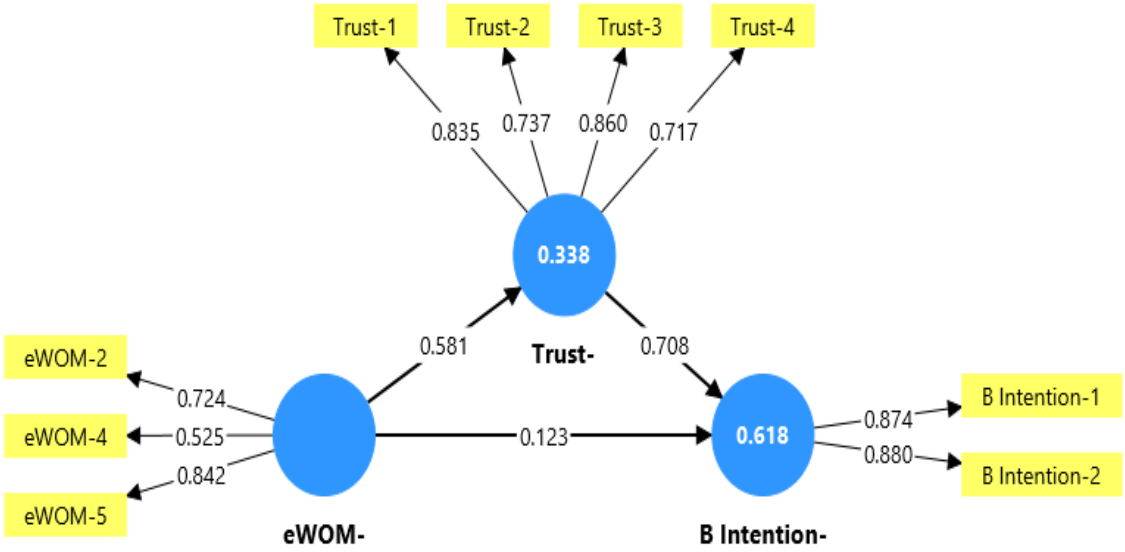


Figure 2: Structural Equation Model of eWOM and Customer's Buying Intentions

Table 6: The Result of the Structural Model

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/ STDEV|)	P values
eWOM- -> B Intention-	0.123	0.124	0.050	2.453	0.014
eWOM- -> Trust-	0.581	0.586	0.043	13.474	0.000
Trust- -> B Intention-	0.708	0.708	0.039	17.961	0.000

Mediation Analysis

Table 7 shows the indirect relationship, Preacher and Hayes's (2008) method was applied. it was found that with the presence of the mediator (trust), the direct relationship between eWOM and customers' buying intention became significant and creates a full-mediation relationship (p=0.000).

Table 7: Indirect Effect of the Model

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics (|O/ STDEV|)	P values
eWOM- -> Trust- -> B Intention-	0.411	0.415	0.038	10.962	0.000

Discussion

This study looked into direct effects of eWOM and Trust on customers buying intentions. It also looked into the indirect relationships by looking at the mediating role of trust, between eWOM and customers' buying intentions.

The first hypothesis tested the impact of eWOM on customers' buying intentions. The findings showed that there is statistically significant impact of eWOM on customers buying intentions. This finding is similar to other recent studies such as the study of Mudaim and Dirgiatm (2024), demonstrated that both the quality and credibility of eWOM significantly shape purchase intentions. Customers also prefer and are attracted to eWOM for its ability to shorten decision making time and improve purchase outcomes. The study of Roy et al., (2024), confirmed the influence of eWOM across diverse online services, showing it not affects consumer attitudes but also their evaluations and decision making. Hence the findings of the current study and the previous studies show that eWOM plays important role in shaping the buying intention of the customers.

The second hypothesis of the study tested the influence of eWOM on customer's trust. The results of study showed that there is statistically significant impact of eWOM on customer's trust. The result aligns with the findings of previous studies which demonstrated that eWOM contributes to building consumer trust in digital environments, Liu and Chen (2023) demonstrated that sharing eWOM enhances trust in source ultimately strengthening consumers' purchase decision. Lee et al., (2023) also found that personalized and relevant eWOM content on social networking platforms fosters relational trust between message senders and receivers. Yet another study by Shafiq, et al., (2023), reported that eWOM reduces perceived risk in online retail environments, thereby strengthening the trust in both the product and the seller. Thus like

many other previous studies (Cheung, et al., 2009; Haji et al., 2014; Fang, 2018), this study's finding confirm that eWOM plays very important role in building consumer trust in the products as well as in the sellers.

The third hypothesis tested was impact of trust on customer's buying intentions. Trust plays significant role in shaping online consumer intentions and behaviour particularly in digital environments where physical product inspection and face to face interaction are absent. Trust is also considered a critical factor due to concerns over product authenticity, data privacy, and transactional transparency. The result of the current study also shows that trust has statistically significant effect on customers' buying intentions. The finding is consistent with previous findings, Bulsara and Vaghela (2023), found that trust directed toward either the seller or the website plays a critical role in determining consumers' willingness to engage in high-risk digital transactions. Yet in another study Wasiq et al., (2023), found that trust reduces perceived risk and facilitates transaction completion. Trust gets even more important in International business, as found by Wistedt (2024), that in cross border e-commerce, perceived trustworthiness fosters consumer commitment, leading to higher purchase intentions.

The fourth and last hypothesis tested in this study was that 'trust mediates between eWOM and customer's buying intentions'. The result of the current study show that trust mediates between eWOM and customer's buying intentions. The finding is consistent with prior studies as shown by Roy et al., (2024), that trust significantly enhances the adoption of eWOM. Another study by Patel (2024), identified brand reputation and trust in online reviews as strong predictors of consumer purchase behaviour, underscoring the centrality of trust as mediator.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study's results have important managerial implications. From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight that trust is the primary channel through which electronic word of mouth (eWOM) influences consumers' buying intentions. The PLS-SEM analysis demonstrated that the indirect pathway (eWOM → Trust → Buying Intention) is substantially stronger than the direct effect of eWOM on buying intention, indicating that marketing managers should focus on strategies that transform eWOM into credible signals of trust.

Specifically, managers are encouraged to implement transparent review policies such as verified-buyer badges, balanced presentation of positive and negative feedback, and prioritization of content-rich reviews that include images or detailed experiences. The study also suggests that encouraging post-purchase content creation and collaborating with local female micro-influencers under clear disclosure practices can enhance the credibility and volume of eWOM, thereby strengthening consumer trust.

Additionally, given that the respondents in this study spend considerable time on social media platforms, firms should maintain an active presence by integrating Arabic-language reviews into their marketing campaigns to increase relatability and trustworthiness. The empirical results further imply that rapid responses to negative reviews, continuous monitoring of trust-related performance indicators, and experimentation with different review display formats (e.g., helpfulness ranking, verified badges) can improve managerial outcomes by fostering stronger trust and higher conversion rates.

Finally, tailoring the presentation of reviews to the preferences of different age segments enhances engagement and purchase intention, with younger consumers favoring concise and visual content, middle-aged consumers responding to text with images, and older consumers relying on detailed information regarding warranties and product quality.

In short, marketing managers and practitioners, especially those engaged in product planning and promotional strategy, can use these findings to formulate and implement more effective strategies, establish long-term trust-based relationships with consumers, and ultimately increase the likelihood of purchase when consumer needs arise.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The main limitation of the study is that convenience sampling was used because no comprehensive sampling frame of female online shoppers in Saudi Arabia was available, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the sample comprised 280 respondents, and a larger sample could provide greater representativeness and statistical power. Other limitation of the study is that it focused exclusively on female online shoppers in Saudi Arabia and examined eWOM, trust, and buying intention, limiting generalization to other populations and potentially relevant variables.

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