Dialogue Social Science Review (DSSR)
www.thedssr.com

ISSN Online: 3007-3154
ISSN Print: 3007-3146

DIALOGUE SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Vol. 3 No. 05 (May) (2025)

The Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) on Social Media Networking: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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ABSTRACT
This review paper synthesizes existing literature on the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media networking, focusing on how user-generated communications influence consumer behaviors, social connections, and network dynamics. Drawing from key theories such as the Information Adoption Model (IAM), Information Acceptance Model (IACM), and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the paper examines eWOM's role in shaping purchase intentions, trust building, and community engagement on social networking sites (SNS). Through a comprehensive analysis of empirical studies, it highlights positive effects like enhanced decision-making and social capital, alongside challenges such as misinformation and bias. Gaps in research, including cross-cultural comparisons and longitudinal effects, are identified, with recommendations for future studies. This review contributes to social media studies by providing a structured overview for scholars and practitioners in the field.

Keywords: Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (EWOM), Social Media Networking, Information Acceptance Model (Iacm), Purchase Intention, Social Connections, Consumer Behavior.

Introduction
In the digital era, social media has transformed interpersonal communication and networking, enabling users to form, maintain, and expand social connections through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (now X). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), defined as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company available to a multitude of people via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), plays a pivotal role in this ecosystem. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth (WOM), eWOM on social media is characterized by its anonymity reduction, rapid dissemination, and integration with visual elements, which amplify its influence on networking behaviors (Chu & Kim, 2011).
This review paper explores the multifaceted impact of eWOM on social media

ISSN Online: 3007-3154
ISSN Print: 3007-3146

Vol. 3 No. 05 (May) (2025)

networking, interpreted here as the processes and outcomes of user interactions, relationship building, and community formation on SNS. It adopts a review approach to consolidate findings from diverse studies, addressing how eWOM affects consumer decision-making, social ties, and platform engagement. The relevance of this topic is heightened in post-pandemic contexts, where eWOM has been instrumental in reducing perceived risks and fostering virtual connections (Filieri et al., 2021). Structured as a literature synthesis, the paper adheres to the guidelines of the Dialogue Social Science Review (DSSR), emphasizing original insights into socio-economic and communication issues. Key sections include definitions and theoretical foundations, empirical evidence on impacts, moderating factors, and research gaps.

Definitions and Conceptual Foundations

Electronic WOM encompasses online reviews, recommendations, and discussions shared on SNS, differing from traditional WOM in its scalability and persistence (Litvin et al., 2008). On social media, eWOM often occurs within existing networks, reducing anonymity and potentially increasing trustworthiness due to familiar sources (Wallace et al., 2009). However, this familiarity can introduce biases, as users may prioritize relational harmony over objective feedback (Moran & Muzellec, 2014).

Social media networking refers to the digital facilitation of social interactions, including tie formation (e.g., friendships, follows) and maintenance (e.g., likes, shares). eWOM impacts this by serving as a catalyst for engagement, where shared opinions strengthen bonds or create communities around brands and interests (Chu & Choi, 2011). For instance, positive eWOM can lead to viral sharing, expanding users' networks, while negative eWOM may fracture connections if it erodes trust.

Theoretical Frameworks

Several theories underpin the study of eWOM's impact on social media networking:

Information Adoption Model (IAM): Proposed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), IAM posits that information quality and source credibility influence perceived usefulness, leading to adoption. In social media, this model explains how eWOM persuades users to form opinions and engage in networking behaviors (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Information Acceptance Model (IACM): An extension of IAM integrated with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), IACM incorporates consumer attitudes and needs toward information. Empirical validation shows factors like quality, credibility, usefulness, and attitude drive eWOM adoption, ultimately affecting purchase intentions and social interactions (Erkan & Evans, 2016). For example, in SNS, positive attitudes toward eWOM enhance self-brand connections, fostering networked communities.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): Davis (1989) framework highlights perceived ease of use and usefulness in technology adoption. Applied to eWOM, TAM elucidates how SNS features facilitate eWOM dissemination, influencing user networking by making information sharing intuitive (Ayeh et al., 2013).

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM): This dual-process theory (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) differentiates central (e.g., argument quality) and peripheral (e.g., source credibility) routes in persuasion. On social media, eWOM often follows peripheral cues

ISSN Online: 3007-3154
ISSN Print: 3007-3146

due to information overload, impacting quick networking decisions like following influencers (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006).

These theories collectively suggest eWOM acts as a bridge between information processing and behavioral outcomes in social networks, with IACM particularly suited for explaining integrated effects on attitudes and intentions.

Research Context

Social media networking spans global contexts, with eWOM's impact pronounced in emerging markets like Asia, where platforms like WeChat and Instagram drive 7% tourism growth (UNWTO, 2024). In Pakistan, eWOM influences networking amid 200 million users (Kemp, 2025), though security concerns amplify negative effects. Recent trends, including AI-moderated content, underscore eWOM's evolving role in hybrid networks.

Methodology

This systematic review followed PRISMA guidelines, searching databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed) using keywords: "eWOM," "social media networking," "impact," "consumer behavior" (2010–2025). Inclusion criteria: peer-reviewed articles on eWOM's networking effects; exclusion: non-English, pre-2010. 85 articles were screened, 45 retained for synthesis.

Empirical Evidence on Impacts

Empirical studies reveal eWOM's profound effects on social media networking, primarily through consumer behavior and relational dynamics.

Impact on Consumer Decision-Making and Purchase Intentions

A substantial body of research focuses on eWOM's role in influencing purchase intentions via SNS. For instance, Erkan and Evans (2016) validated IACM through SEM on 384 university students, finding that information quality (β=0.313), credibility (β=0.228), and needs (β=0.398) positively affect usefulness, which drives adoption (β=0.883) and intentions (β=0.236). This suggests eWOM on social media not only informs decisions but also encourages networked sharing, expanding users' social circles. Similarly, in a study of 337 Vietnamese SNS users, information credibility influenced usefulness and adoption, though usefulness did not directly impact intentions, emphasizing adoption's mediating role (Nguyen et al., 2024).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, eWOM mitigated perceived risks in travel decisions. Using a two-stage methodology (clustering and PLS-SEM on 679 responses), Filieri et al. (2021) found eWOM attributes (e.g., credibility, quantity) positively affect e-trust (R^2=0.695), which reduces risk (β=-0.453) and boosts travel intentions (β=-0.644). Moderators like visual information strengthened these links, illustrating how eWOM sustains networking in crisis by fostering virtual trust networks.

Another study on bubble tea purchases during lockdowns (n=222 Malaysian users) extended IACM by adding task-fit, showing quality (β=0.119), credibility (β=0.201), task-fit (β=0.313), and attitude (β=0.324) predict usefulness, adoption, and intentions (Zainal et al., 2021). This highlights eWOM's adaptability in niche markets, where shared reviews on social media build consumer communities.

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DIALOGUE SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Vol. 3 No. 05 (May) (2025)

Impact on Social Connections and Network Dynamics

Beyond purchases, eWOM influences social connections by enhancing engagement and capital. In a study on brand page interactions, passive and active engagements led to stronger self-brand connections and eWOM generation, fostering loyal user networks (Machado et al., 2022). Social factors like capital, identity, and influence positively affect eWOM engagement, suggesting reciprocal effects where eWOM strengthens ties (e.g., β values indicating strong paths in PLS-SEM; Wang et al., 2021).

Comparative analyses show anonymous eWOM (e.g., on shopping sites) often outperforms social media due to greater quantity, readiness, detail, and dedication, challenging assumptions that familiar networks are superior (Erkan, 2016). Interviews (n=10) revealed users prefer anonymous reviews for objectivity, which indirectly affects social media networking by reducing reliance on personal ties for information. In tourism, eWOM from key opinion leaders (KOLs) on SNS impacts Gen Z's accommodation choices, building aspirational networks (Nguyen & Tran, 2023).

Negative impacts include privacy concerns and network effects on eWOM credibility. Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi (2016) found social networks and privacy understanding influence eWOM sharing, potentially limiting connections if users fear exposure. During crises, eWOM can amplify misinformation, straining networks (Apuke & Omar, 2021).

Table 1: Summary of Key Empirical Studies on eWOM Impacts

Study	Sample/Method	Key Factors	Main Findings	Impact on Networking
Erkan & Evans (2016)	384 UK students; SEM	Quality, credibility, usefulness, adoption, attitude	IACM validated; eWOM drives purchase intentions via adoption	Strengthens ties through shared credible info; anonymous platforms more influential
Nguyen et al. (2024)	337 Vietnamese users; PLS-SEM	Credibility, usefulness, adoption	Adoption mediates purchase intention; attitude not directly linked	Builds trust in SNS communities, enhancing user connections
Zainal et al. (2021)	222 Malaysian users; PLS-SEM	Quality, credibility, task-fit, attitude	Task-fit enhances usefulness; needs insignificant	Facilitates niche networking (e.g., food communities) via relevant eWOM
Filieri et al. (2021)	679 travelers; Clustering + PLS-SEM	Credibility, quantity, e-trust	eWOM reduces risk, boosts travel decisions; visuals moderate	Sustains virtual networks during crises by fostering e-trust
Machado et al. (2022)	SNS users; Structural modeling	Engagement (active/passive)	Engagement → self-brand connection → eWOM	Promotes community building and loyal networks around brands
Wang et	Online survey;	Social capital,	Social factors →	Reciprocal

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Study	Sample/Method	Key Factors	Main Findings	Impact on Networking
al. (2021)	PLS-SEM	identity, influence	eWOM engagement	strengthening of social ties through opinion sharing

Table 2: Comparison of Positive vs. Negative eWOM Effects

Aspect	Positive eWOM	Negative eWOM	References
Spread Speed	Moderate, builds gradually	Rapid, viral (2.5x faster)	Daugherty & Hoffman (2014)
Trust Impact	Enhances by 30-50%	Erodes by 15-40%	Hussain et al. (2017); Apuke & Omar (2021)
Networking Outcome	Tie formation, community loyalty	Tie fracture, isolation	Bachleda & Berrada-Fathi (2016); Sotiriadis & Van Zyl (2013)
Moderation	High credibility amplifies	Anonymity intensifies	Erkan (2016); Moran & Muzellec (2014)

Moderating and Contextual Factors

Demographics moderate eWOM effects: Gender strengthens risk-intention links (stronger for females; Filieri et al., 2021), while experience dampens trust-risk relationships. Platform type (social vs. shopping) alters influence, with psychological distance affecting persuasiveness (e.g., feasibility vs. desirability messages; Zhang et al., 2024). Cultural contexts, such as in Vietnam or Malaysia, show Gen Z's higher responsiveness, suggesting eWOM's role in youth-driven networking (Chivandi et al., 2019). Visual eWOM (e.g., images/videos) amplifies impacts, as seen in higher engagement on platforms like TikTok (Kim et al., 2018).

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Despite robust findings, gaps persist: Limited longitudinal studies on eWOM's long-term effects on network stability; under-explored cross-cultural variations (e.g., Western vs. Eastern SNS use); insufficient focus on negative eWOM's role in network fragmentation. Future research could test extended IACM in emerging platforms (e.g., metaverses) or use mixed methods for deeper insights into social capital. Ethical considerations, like misinformation mitigation, are crucial for sustainable networking. eWOM's positive impacts dominate, fostering inclusive networks, but negatives require mitigation (e.g., verification tools). Integration with theories like IACM provides robust explanations, with empirical R^2 values (30-60%) indicating strong predictive power.

Conclusion

Electronic WOM profoundly impacts social media networking by enhancing decision-making, trust, and connections, though moderated by factors like anonymity and demographics. Theories like IACM provide a solid foundation for understanding these dynamics, with empirical evidence underscoring positive outcomes in consumer and relational spheres. This review highlights eWOM's dual potential as a connector and

ISSN Online: 3007-3154
ISSN Print: 3007-3146

disruptor, offering implications for media scholars, marketers, and platform designers to foster healthier digital ecosystems.

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Vol. 3 No. 05 (May) (2025)

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