



The Effects of Digital Word-Of-Mouth on Brand Image and Purchase Intention

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on consumer behaviour, and more specifically on product brand image and purchase intention. After a brief review of the academic literature, The research employs a survey-based method. The structured questionnaire was designed using google forms and was shared online. Using a 20 question and convenience sampling method, the data were collected from 140 consumers in Algeria.

The results of the data analysis, using PLS. V3 structural equations, show that e-WOM has a positive and significant impact on brand image and purchase intention, and that the WOM and BI have a significant positive impact on PI.

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Introduction

The democratisation of new information and communication technologies (NICT) and access to the Internet have redefined the way companies communicate. Thus, faced with the exhaustion of traditional advertising communication and the disaffection of consumers, a new alternative form of interpersonal communication has emerged [1, 2].

Word-of-mouth marketing differs from natural word-of-mouth referrals to a company's products and services in that it can result from a company's promotion, encouragement or other influence, i.e. "priming". When a customer has a great time at a restaurant because their expectations were exceeded and then talks about it on Twitter, or when someone has had a great experience using a product in a new way and tells everyone they know about it, these are examples of word-of-mouth marketing. Furthermore, word-of-mouth marketing does not stop with the first interaction; it tends to lead to a cascade of successive interactions.

The concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) was introduced in the mid-1990s, when the Internet was beginning to change the ways consumers interacted with each other.

Since, its emergence it has received a great deal of attention from marketing academics and practitioners alike [3].

A communication in which the consumer takes the initiative to send messages (positive or negative) on the Internet about a brand or a product. eWOM is an important marketing technique in brand communications, and it plays an important role in modern e-commerce. eWOM marketing is the oldest, most cost-efficient, and most effective way to create customers and grow any business. This interpersonal communication, referred to in the literature as

"electronic word-of-mouth" (eWOM), has been defined by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) [4] as any positive or negative statement made by potential, current or former consumers about a product, service, brand or company, which is made available to a multitude of other people or institutions via the Internet [5].

Word of mouth is probably the oldest sales, marketing and communication technique in existence. Word of mouth, synonymous with recommendation, has proven to be effective in all businesses. The purpose of word-of-mouth is to convey a message to the consumer and to give him/her all the reasons and means to pass on information to potential customers in his/her surroundings. It also encompasses all techniques that allow a message, product or brand to be spread widely, and is a means of quickly creating a buzz or a fad around an item. This person-to-person exchange of information has a significant impact on consumer decision-making [6]. Indeed, electronic reviews and recommendations are increasingly becoming a very influential source of information for decision-making.

According to Nielsen, 92% of people worldwide say they trust recommendations from friends and family (earned media) before any other form of advertising.

50 years later, this approach has become a widely used marketing tactic. And the data proves it: 74% of consumers consider word-of-mouth to be an essential part of their purchase decision. And 92% of consumers say they trust recommendations from friends [7]. eWOM is a powerful market force, because consumers find it an unbiased and trustworthy source of product information.

Word-of-mouth is seven times more effective than magazines and newspapers, four times more effective than sellers and finally, twice as effective as radios in influencing consumers to change brands [8].

In this regard, the problematic of our research is the following:

What is the role of digital word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on consumer perception?

An overview of studies in the field of the effects of online WOM communication has led to the insight that e-WOM can have effects on variables such as brand image or purchase intention. Therefore, it can be explained in following model which is adapted from Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012 and tested on a different population [9, 10].

The research objective

The main aim of this study is to shed light on the concept of word-of-mouth and to understand the role of the e-WOM on consumer behavior and specifically its effects on brand image and purchase intention.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is playing an increasingly influential role in informing consumers' purchasing decisions.

Today, the means of disseminating information are increasingly numerous, particularly with the advent of the Internet, the appearance of social media and the rise of social networks. This technological revolution has made the task of advertisers easier by making the circulation of information much faster, more efficient and universal. More specifically, the aim of this research is to show the importance of this tool in the purchase decision process and in particular its influence on the consumer's attitude towards the product and the purchase intention.

Research interest:

Society has become more and more a virtual society, using the Internet more and more to circulate information. It is undeniable that the Internet must be integrated into a company's communication strategy since digital social networks have invaded all areas: political, social, cultural, economic and even our daily lives. Today's companies have seen the emergence of a new communication strategy since the early 1990s.

Research methodology

We use descriptive and analytical methods, supported by literature review techniques and the electronic questionnaire. The descriptive method is used to describe the basic concepts. For the analysis of the results, we used the PLS version 3 structural equations, which is widely used in marketing research. As we are going to predict the purchase intention of the product, this method becomes more and more suitable.

Literature review

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)

Word-of-mouth marketing (WOM) is about reflecting a consumer's interest in a company's product or service in their daily dialogue. It is essentially free advertising triggered by customers' experiences - and usually something beyond what they expected. Word-of-mouth marketing can be encouraged by various advertising activities undertaken by companies, or by having the opportunity to encourage consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-marketer communications. Also known as "word-of-mouth advertising", word-of-mouth marketing includes buzz, viral marketing, blogging, emotional marketing and social media marketing.

WOM can be defined as "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers" [11].

Word of mouth is a phenomenon whereby a brand's customer tells others about the brand in a conversation. It is a very powerful marketing tool for retailers and businesses. The purpose of word-of-mouth is twofold:

- Brand recommendation;
- Brand warning.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) [4] defined e-WOM as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company which is made available to multitude of the people and institutes via the Internet"

There are several platforms of discussion that facilitate eWOM like forums, blogs, consumer product reviews that influence the use of product and services.

Purchase intention

The oldest definition of purchase intention is the subjective probability that users will engage in a certain behaviour. If users want to obtain a specific product or service, it means that there is a purchase intention in their minds. a specific product or service, it means that there is a purchase intention in their minds; they want to buy that product or service, whether in the long or short term. When consumers have a positive reputation or opinion of the brand's products or services, purchase intentions will most often materialise, as they are influenced by their positive expression of the product [12].

According to Chen, Chen, & Tung, (2018) purchase intention is "the willingness of consumers to purchase green products". Duhaime et al. (1996), defined purchase intention as a step of the decision-making process where the consumer expresses his preference for a product based on his experience, beliefs, and attitudes.

Brand image

Brand image is a series of associations (perceptions) that exist in the minds of consumers towards a brand, usually organised into a meaning. Relationships with brands will become stronger if they are based on experience and obtain a lot of information. Images or associations represent perceptions that may or may not reflect an objective reality. The fact that this image is formed from the association (perception) is what underlies the decision to buy brand loyalty from consumers.

Brand image is defined in terms of current associations, subjective perceptions and a set of beliefs about a particular brand that are present in the minds of consumers. This has been described as a 'brand image' [13, 14].

Furthermore, the literature has shown that brand image has been deemed crucial for many industries. It is therefore defined as "a set of perceptions about a brand, reflected in the brand associations held in memory. Brand associations are informational links containing the meaning of the brand for consumers" [13].

Keller (1998) conceptualized brand image as a perception of consumers when they see a brand and reflected by brand associations in their mind [15].

Brand image comprises the attributes and benefits associated with a brand that make the brand distinctive, thereby Distinguishing the firm's offer from competition.

The brand image could be defined as the set of representations associated with a brand, whether cognitive or affective. For (Aaker, 1994), this image will create value for the brand.

Based on this information, it seems legitimate to propose the following hypothesis:

- ✓ H.1 Electronic word of mouth has a significant and a positive impact on brand image.
- ✓ H.2 The brand image has a significant and a positive impact on purchase intention (PI).
- ✓ H.3 Electronic word of mouth has a positive and direct influence on the purchase intention (PI) of the recommended product.

Based on this literature review, we have established the following research model:

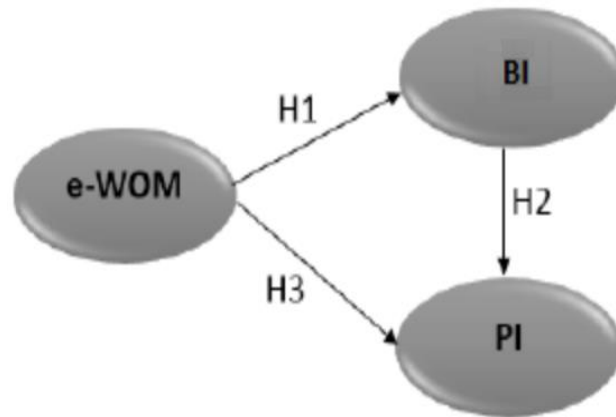


Figure 1 Proposed research model.

Source: Conceived by the author

Material and methods

Research methodology

Product selection

We have selected electronic products and more precisely smart phone "The iPhone 13 Pro Max " from the videos broadcast by the youtubers Anis Lebsi.

The iPhone 13 Pro Max is the latest generation of smartphone developed by the American giant Apple. It is a large-format model with high performance and a large number of features. With its many qualities, this device is undoubtedly a reference in its product category. Apple iPhone 13 Pro Max 6,7" 5G 128 Go Double SIM

Generally, Algerian consumers often use this channel to describe, evaluate and share their experiences and opinions with other internet users.

Table 1 Selection of the product

Product category	Product	Brand	Nom du produit
Electronic products	smart phone	iPhone	The iPhone 13 Pro Max

Source: Conceived by the author

Selection of measurement scales

The operationalisation of the constructs was based on the use of measurement scales tested in the marketing literature. To this end, we adopted the measurement scales of [16, 17] and (Munch & Swasy, 1988) in order to measure respectively the purchase intention, the global attitude towards the product and concerning the electronic **WOM**, the choice of the measurement scale was fixed on (scale of (Bansal & Voyer, 2000)) [18]. These scales have good internal consistency.

We chose the Likert scale since it is more common and is widely used in marketing research. This Likert scale is based on five points ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The questionnaire consisted of 12 items. Electronic word of mouth was measured using 5 items, borrowed from **Bansal et Voyer (2000)** [18], Brand image was measured using 3 items borrowed from Davis et al. (2009) and Purchase intention was measured using 3 items from **Xia et Bechwati (2008)** [16].

The target population and sample of our study

The number of questionnaires distributed online is 150 and received as many as 150. But, the questionnaire that useable is only 140 responses, which constitutes our sample. These people are aged between 18 and 56 years old and all live in Algeria. For the sample, we used a random sample distributed as follows:

76% of the respondents were men and 24% were women. The age group 21-25 years occupied 78% of the total sample respectively. Regarding the level of education, 73% of the respondents have a university degree and 16% have a master or doctorate degree.

Regarding experience of using the Internet, 75.5% of the respondents stated that they had been using the Internet for more than 8 years. The majority of respondents use the Internet every day (82%). When people are looking for an opinion or comment on a product, the main platform used by the respondents is the facebook (68%), Youtube (14%), Instagram (12%) and Twitter (6%).

Results and discussion

Reliability and validity

The validation of the external model "the measurement model" is done through the Bartlett's sphericity test which must be significant (Bartlett's significance < 5%) and the Kaiser, Meyer and Olkin Index (KMO) which must be higher than the recommended threshold of 0.70.

According to the table below, all variables are correlated with each other: we accept the correlation, since Cronbach's coefficient, KMO values and Bartlett's index are highly significant. The data are indeed suitable for factoring since

- The KMO values are above 0.7 (electronic word of mouth (**e-WOM**), and consumer attitude towards the product (Att P) purchase intention (PI)).
- Cronbach's Alpha is excellent for all variables for consumer attitude towards the product (Att P), **e-WOM** and purchase intention (PI).
- Bartlett's tests are also highly significant for all variables $p=0.000$.
- All values of the explained variances exceed 70%. (See Table)

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Then the results of the data analysis should be discussed. Finally, the author is invited to interpret the results objectively, based on statistics and sound arguments.

Table 2 The results of the reliability analysis

variable	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Bartlett's Sphericity Test. (Sig.)
e-Wom	0,792	0,657	0,000
BI	0,803	0,609	0,000
PI	0,857	0,714	0,000

Source: Conceived by the author based on the SPSS Outputs

To check the discriminant and convergent validity of our conceptual model (measurement model), we obtained this table. Therefore, according to the values in this table, the convergent and discriminant validity are well and truly verified.

Table 3 Convergent construct validity

Variable	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
e-Wom	0,915	0,824	0,875
BI	0,814	0,881	0,841
PI	0,839	0,847	0,856

Source: Conceived by the author-based SmartPLS Version 3 Output

Test of the hypothesis of the influence of (e-WOM) and (BI) on (PI)

According to the table below we find that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) strongly and positively influences the Brand Image (BI) since ($\beta= 0.452$ and $p =0.000$). In other words, a positive correlation between the Brand Image (BI) and the electronic word of mouth is validated since ($R^2=0.514$) coefficient $\beta =0.452$. This means that the variance of the Brand Image (BI) is explained by 51.4% of the electronic word of mouth, which confirms hypothesis H1.

The relationship between Brand Image (BI) and purchase intention is significant since the coefficient $\beta =0.103$ with ($R^2=0.481$) and $p =0.001$, which confirms hypothesis H2.

Based on the result it is concluded that brand image (BI) has a positive effect on the The iPhone 13 Pro Max customers' repurchase intention. Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported. This result is consistent with study conducted by Wang and Yang (2010), Shukla (2010), , and Wu *et al.* (2011).

Based on the result it is concluded that electronic word of mouth has a positive effect on the The iPhone 13 Pro Max customers' repurchase intention.

We also find that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) directly and positively influences purchase intention (PI) since ($\beta= 0.383$ and $p =0.000$) which leads us to accept hypothesis (H3).

This result is consistent with study conducted by Stauss (1997, 2000); Rowley (2001), Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), ACNieslen (2007).

Stauss (1997, 2000) stated that the opportunities and threats for business brought about by the rise in online customer articulations, which means that EWOM gives a positive and a significant effect.

In other words, 48% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by electronic word-of-mouth and Brand Image BI.

These results are in line with the existing literature. They affirm the role of electronic word-of-mouth on consumer behaviour and more specifically on Brand Image (BI) and purchase intention. Knowing that electronic word-of-mouth strongly influences the Brand Image (BI) and the purchase intention. *Moreover, WOM has a positive impact on both BI and PI.*

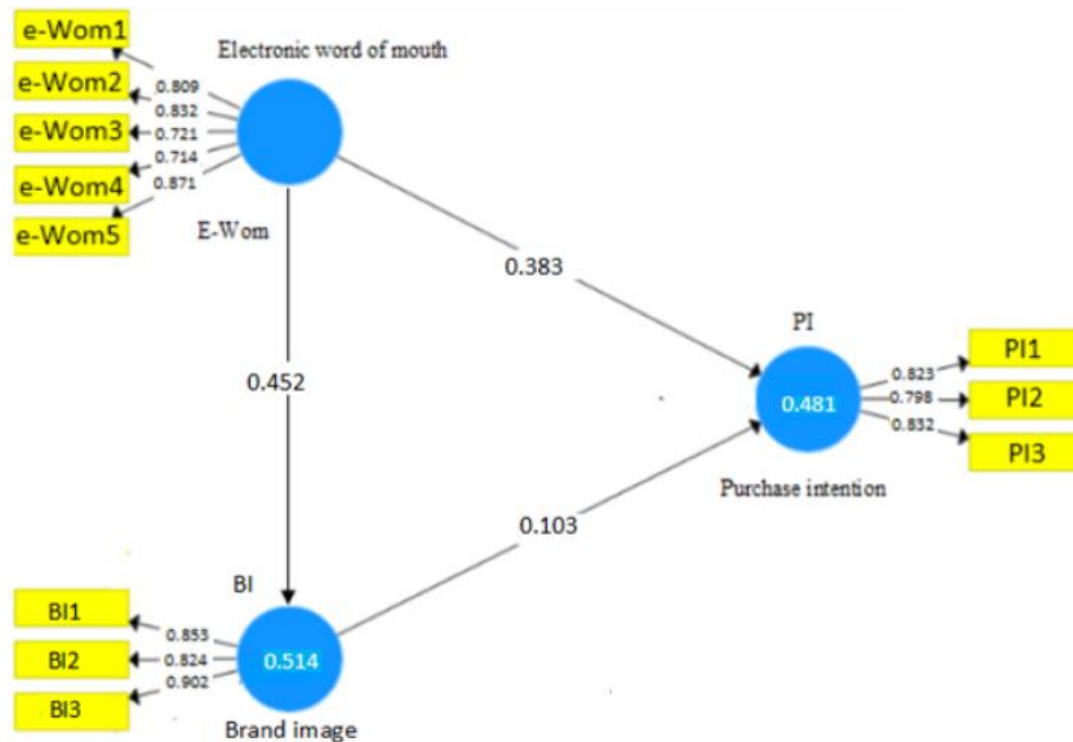


Figure 2 The conceptual research model
Source: The smart PLS Version 3 Output

Discussion

From the results obtained, we can say that electronic word of mouth positively influences the Algerian consumer behaviour. In other words, the more positive and important the comments are, the more positive the consumer's perception of the brand image is. This can be explained by the fact that positive comments and various recommendations go hand in hand with the favourable perception of the brand image towards the product, so there is a close relationship between (e-WOM) and (BI). When Internet users recommend the product, this favours the positive perception of the brand image among Algerian consumers. And when the latter is positive, it positively affects purchase intention. The electronic (e-WOM) now plays a crucial role in the consumer's decision-making process.

These main results lead us to conclude that the (e-WOM) can influence consumer behaviour and directly modify:

- The consumer's perception of the brand image
- Purchase intention (PI)

Conclusion

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Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing occurs when consumers talk about a company's product or service to their friends, family and others with whom they have close relationships.

Word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most powerful forms of advertising, as consumers trust their friends more than the traditional media.

Companies can encourage WOM marketing by exceeding expectations about a product, providing good customer service and giving consumers exclusive information.

The results reveal that this electronic word-of-mouth influence indirectly and positively influences the BI towards the recommended product and the purchase intention. Some influencers communicate via social networks (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, vlogs, instagram...). They have a lot of social capital in their network. He creates videos, disseminates information and publishes messages about products and brands. This information is then picked up and widely shared by his followers and fans through the electronic word of mouth effect.

This study confirmed these statements, but indicated that the relationship between the three variables is different. In other words, there is a positive and significant relationship, except that the influence of word-of-mouth is more important on brand image than on purchase intention, i.e. consumers influence other people in terms of beliefs, opinions and feelings much more than in terms of expressing a purchase intention towards the product.

Limitations and recommendations for future studies:

The study sample only included participants from the same regions of the country. The sample could be extended to other regions of the selected country to make the sample more representative of the overall population. The sample could be expanded to include people from other countries, which would allow for a better understanding of cultural differences.

Another limitation is the choice to use only one product category (high-tech products (mobile phones)) in our quantitative study. Indeed, the study only focused on this main category to measure the impact of ewom on consumers' brand image and purchase intention.

We did not take into consideration services, we only focused on products.

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Author's short biography

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Is a professor of management science specializing in marketing, she has more than 10 years in higher education as a teacher, she has several articles in marketing, entrepreneurship, social responsibility, e-learning, governance, management, sustainable development, renewable energies , Islamic economics, she has contributed to several international congresses and conferences
