

Green Echo: Empirical Insights into E-WOM's Influence on Purchase Intentions for Sustainable Products

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Abstract

Proliferation and economic expansion has brought extensive shifts in technology revolution, production and consumption practices due to increased usage of social media among consumers. Social media has brought a new perspective in purchase intension of consumers. Also with the evolution of vigorous settings for development, environment has been deteriorating and human beings have their focus on consumption activities. Therefore, marketers are trying to push consumers towards the consumption of green products. Studies have also resulted in that there is a substantial persuasion of electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the consumer's purchase intention. Therefore, a conceptual model was developed to clarify and factually verify the factors forming green purchase intentions. Three factors E-wom, Information, Quality and Source Credibility have been taken as exogenous variables. The model was tested and validated statistically with the help of SEM. Data has been collected from 450 respondents. All hypotheses were found to be statistically important. The impact of all the factors was found to be most influential on purchase intention. The findings of the study will aid marketers to better understand how E- wom plays a significant role in shaping consumers' purchase intentions.

Keywords: *E-wom, Information Quality, Source credibility, Purchase intention.*

INTRODUCTION

The escalating concerns about environmental degradation have gained significant attention in recent times. News articles and documentaries vividly portray the detrimental impact of our disposable culture on the environment. According to World Bank data, the economic toll of diverse environmental pollutions amounted to 2.8% of gross national income in 2018 (UNEP, 2011), intensifying the urgency for the adoption of a green economy as a sustainable path for economic progress. The green economy, characterized by low carbon emissions, high resource efficiency, and inclusive development, aspires to foster green growth (Li et al., 2018, 2019a). However, realizing this vision becomes challenging in the absence of environment-friendly technologies and products (Li et al., 2020; Mealy and Teytelboym, 2020), particularly those associated with green brands. Globalization and economic growth have precipitated substantial shifts in consumption behavior, production strategies, and technological advancements, accompanied by the widespread adoption of internet usage and its acceptance among consumers (Shao, 2009; Shang, Chen, and Liao, 2006). In this era, the impact of Schlosser's observations in 2005 has only intensified, solidifying social media's standing as a paramount consumer marketing tool. Beyond its initial role, social media has evolved into a dynamic electronic

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communication platform, fostering the exchange of information, ideas, and user-generated content through networking and blogging (S. Krishnamurthy and W. Dou, 2008). In this context, the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on consumers' purchase intentions for sustainable products has become a topic of significant interest and research (Christi & Junaedi, 2021). The relation of product sustainability to WOM could be seen in a study on tourism, wherein a greater perception of foreign tourists in their sustainability assessment increased the WOM intention of foreign tourists (Halim et al., 2022). Furthermore, positive and negative information related to sustainability on social media significantly influences consumers' intention to purchase sustainable products. In today's digital age, the power of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) cannot be underestimated in shaping consumers' purchase intentions for sustainable products (Christi & Junaedi, 2021). Nevertheless, it was suggested that consumers' concern about the environment and social responsibility does not necessarily affect their choice of sustainable products (Kang et al., 2013).

However, it is important to note that there is often a gap between consumer attitudes and behavior, referred to as the "attitude-behavior" gap. This attitude-behavior gap means that even though consumers may express concern for the environment and social responsibility, it does not always translate into their actual choice of sustainable products. Despite the gap between consumer attitudes and behavior, studies have shown that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on social media can significantly influence consumers' intention to purchase sustainable products (Christi & Junaedi, 2021). The pervasive adoption of various social media platforms and the management of multiple accounts across diverse sites and smartphone apps by more than 70% of consumers underscore the transformative influence of social media on contemporary consumer behavior. The surge in global social media usage over the past decade, driven by a technologically-inclined consumer segment, is a testament to the platform's increasing significance. However, the positive aspects of economic growth and technological advancement are not without their environmental consequences, as highlighted by scholars such as K. S. Bawa and L. P. Koh (2010). As the use of social networking platforms continues to rise, it not only contributes to user growth but also gives rise to an amplified phenomenon—electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Consumers leverage eWOM to share opinions and experiences about various products and services with friends or like-minded individuals, and companies have unrestricted access to this valuable eWOM information (Gupta & Harris, 2010; Hajli, 2018; Seifert & Kwon, 2019). This growing trend is particularly significant in influencing consumer behavior in the context of green products. As consumers increasingly turn to social network platforms to obtain detailed information about new products (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016), social media has emerged as a pivotal source of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) information. The reliance on social media for product information has become more pronounced, with studies indicating a shift in consumer preferences towards social network platforms to gain insights into unfamiliar products (Teng et al., 2014). Social media platforms have become a vital source of eWOM information, allowing consumers to share their opinions, experiences, and recommendations related to green products. This electronic form of word-of-mouth communication has gained prominence as an influential factor in shaping consumer preferences and purchase behavior. According to Teng et al. (2014), consumers are more likely to change their preferences and purchasing behavior when exposed to persuasive eWOM.

Recent studies emphasizing consumers' preference for social network platforms as crucial sources of detailed information about new products (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) highlight the integral role of social media platforms as significant sources of eWOM information. The persuasive influence of eWOM, as highlighted by Teng et al. (2014), underscores its potential to reshape consumer preferences and alter purchasing behavior. Recognizing the centrality of social media, it becomes imperative to unravel its multifaceted role as a platform shaping the perceptions of young consumers and

influencing their purchase intentions, particularly in the realm of green products. This study, therefore, embarks on an exploration of the factors influencing consumers' green purchase intentions, providing nuanced insights for marketers to formulate strategies that not only resonate with consumer preferences but also promote the adoption of sustainable and eco-friendly products.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND and HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The present study draws upon a robust theoretical foundation to investigate the intricate relationship between Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and the purchase intentions of green products. This exploration is guided by contemporary theories that illuminate the dynamics of consumer behavior, communication, and environmental consciousness. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) significantly influences consumers' purchase intentions, particularly in the context of green products, which are characterized by environmental and sustainability attributes. eWOM, conveyed through online platforms like social media and review sites, plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. One key aspect is the informational value of eWOM. Green products often lack extensive marketing campaigns, and consumers seek authentic information about their performance and environmental impact. eWOM provides a valuable source of real-life experiences and opinions, enabling consumers to make more informed decisions about purchasing environmentally friendly products. Additionally, eWOM contributes to the development of trust and credibility. Consumers tend to trust recommendations from peers more than traditional advertising, and positive eWOM fosters a sense of trust in the product and brand. Trust is a critical factor influencing purchase intention, and when consumers perceive eWOM as credible, it positively impacts their willingness to purchase green products. Moreover, eWOM serves as a powerful social influence tool. As individuals within social networks share positive experiences with green products, it creates a social norm that influences the attitudes and behaviors of others. The communal aspect of eWOM enhances its impact, as consumers are more likely to align their purchase intentions with the positive sentiments expressed by their peers. In essence, the theoretical foundation of eWOM's impact on the purchase intention of green products lies in its ability to provide valuable information, enhance trust, and exert social influence, making it a crucial element in the decision-making process for environmentally conscious consumers.

eWOM and Purchase Intention of Green Products:

The transformative impact of social media on the choice between green and non-green goods, encouraging consumers to opt for environmentally conscious and competitive products (Singh et al., 2012), is emblematic of a paradigm shift. Organizations, recognizing the potential for expanded visibility, increasingly leverage various social platforms to reach customers across digital networks. The internet's role in enabling novel communication platforms further empowers both providers and consumers, facilitating the exchange of information and opinions in a reciprocal manner. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication, as elucidated by Wang et al. (2012), involves positive or negative statements made by potential, current, or former customers about a product or company, disseminated to a broad audience through the internet. The direct and implicit influence of social media interactions on purchasing decisions, highlighted by Wang et al. (2012) and Hajli (2014), is further underscored by the positive correlation between social media experiences and brand faith and product attitude. The influential power of eWOM, characterized by its anonymous nature and diverse content, continues to expand. Antecedents contributing to eWOM effects (Doh, 2009) play a critical role, and consumers' trust in green products can be cultivated through consistent, supportive interactions on social media platforms (Kang & Hur, 2012). This intricate interplay of factors emphasizes the need for a comprehensive exploration of the nexus between social

media, eWOM, and green purchase intentions, setting the stage for a more profound understanding of consumer behavior in the contemporary digital landscape. The above literature has helped us to figure out that Ewom usage affects purchase intentions and propose the hypothesis that:

H1: There exists a positive correlation between Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and the purchase intention of green products

Commonly recognized as a precursor in the central route, information quality is acknowledged for its role in conveying the persuasive strength of a message, as described by Cheung and Thadani (2012). In the context of the current study, information quality is elucidated as the influential potency inherent in Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). Specifically, previous research has consistently asserted that high-quality information has a positive impact on purchase intentions (Lee and Shin, 2014; Park et al., 2007). Sussman and Siegal (2003) and Cheung and Lee (2012) have anticipated, especially within online platforms, that the perceived usefulness or information usefulness is an individual perception shaped by the assimilation of novel ideas and opinions. This perception, contributing to the articulation of product or service performance, serves as a predictor for user adoption and system usage, displaying robust associations. There is a prevailing belief that comments, online reviews, and opinions shared by opinion leaders or experienced individuals within online platforms wield significant influence when deemed useful. This literature synthesis has led us to discern that the utilization of E-WOM significantly impacts purchase intentions, thereby forming the basis for our hypothesis.

H2: Information Quality is positively related to purchase intention of green products

Source Credibility and Purchase Intention of Green Products

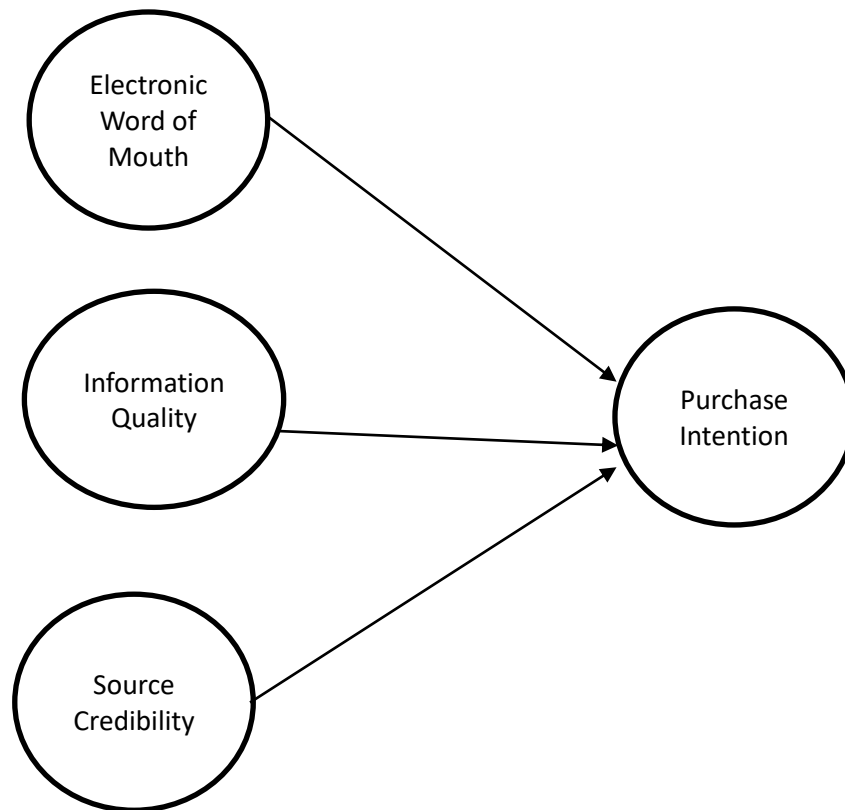
Source credibility stands out as a pivotal catalyst in the peripheral routes, primarily because it hinges on the receivers' perception of a message's credibility (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). The credibility of an information source becomes a peripheral cue for information recipients, encompassing the perceived credibility of the source based on the communicator's assertions. The level of positive attributes associated with the information provider, constituting source credibility, profoundly influences recipients' confidence, belief, trustworthiness, and perception of competence. These factors, in turn, contribute to the overall acceptance of a given message (Cheong and Morrison, 2008). When consumers deem information credible, they exhibit a heightened willingness to engage in various forms of communication. In online environments, where users have the liberty to express themselves without face-to-face interactions, the conventional indicators of information credibility may not be readily applicable (Reichelt et al., 2014). Notably, studies have uncovered that information credibility emerges as a primary determinant in consumers' decision-making processes (Awad and Ragowsky, 2008). Furthermore, empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated the profound impact of information credibility on consumers' purchase intentions (Prendergast et al., 2010). Consequently, we posit that:

H3. The Source Credibility is positively related to purchase intention of green products

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study presents a comprehensive conceptual model aimed at elucidating consumers' intentions towards green purchases. The selection of variables within the framework is rooted in a thorough review of the existing literature, highlighting their significance in predicting green purchase intentions. The pivotal components integrated into the conceptual framework include Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), Information Quality, and Source Credibility. These variables collectively form the foundation for

understanding and predicting the intricate dynamics of consumer decision-making in the context of environmentally conscious purchasing behavior.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To fulfill the study objectives, a self-administered questionnaire was employed, featuring items derived from existing literature. The questionnaire underwent pre-testing and subsequent modifications based on expert feedback to enhance its effectiveness. Comprising five distinct sections, the questionnaire covered Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), Source Credibility, Information Quality, Purchase Intention, and Demographics. In the E-WOM section, respondents addressed five items, while Source Credibility and Information Quality sections included four items each. Measurement utilized a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree). This methodological approach, anchored in established scales and a well-structured questionnaire, aimed at efficiently capturing pertinent data to analyze the relationships between E-WOM, Source Credibility, Information Quality, and Purchase Intention in the context of green consumer behavior.

Table 1 Demographic Variables

| Variables | Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 180 | 40 |
| | Female | 270 | 60 |
| | 20-30 | 198 | 44 |
| | 30-40 | 99 | 22 |

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------|-----|-------|
| Age | 40-50 | 27 | 6 |
| | 50-60 | 36 | 8 |
| Education | High school | 81 | 18 |
| | Graduate | 135 | 30 |
| | Post graduate | 247 | 55 |
| | Others | 27 | 6 |
| Monthly Income | Under 10000 | 4 | .89 |
| | 10000-20000 | 59 | 13.11 |
| | 20000-30000 | 144 | 32 |
| | 30000-40000 | 234 | 52 |
| | Above 40000 | 9 | 2 |

Table 2: Measures

| Construct | Items | Cronbach Alpha |
|--------------------------|---|----------------|
| Electronic Word of Mouth | <p>Ewom1I regularly check online reviews to see which products others like.</p> <p>Ewom2 I often read product reviews online to make sure I choose the right item.</p> <p>Ewom3 I consult online reviews from other consumers to help me pick the right product.</p> <p>Ewom4 Before buying, I often gather info from online reviews to learn about a product.</p> <p>Ewom5 If I don't read online reviews before buying, I worry about my decision</p> | 0.810 |
| Information Quality | <p>IQ1 I find it easy to grasp information about eco-friendly products on social media.</p> <p>IQ2 I find information about eco-friendly products on social media to be straightforward.</p> <p>IQ3 I believe it's easy for me to understand information about green products on social media.</p> <p>IQ4 Overall, I think the information about eco-friendly products on social media is of good quality.</p> | 0.790 |

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------|
| Information Credibility | IC1 I believe they make a good case. IC2 I think they are powerful. IC3 I trust that they are reliable. IC4 I believe they are correct. | 0.752 |
| Purchase Intention | PI1 If I read reviews about green products on social media, I'll probably buy one of them. PI2 The next time I need a similar product, I'll buy one of those green products. PI3 I'll suggest green products to my friends just like that. | 0.766 |

To gather the data, a simple random sampling technique was employed. The questionnaire was disseminated via social media to individuals who either express a preference for purchasing green products or have a history of buying such products. A total of 490 questionnaires were distributed across various social media platforms. Subsequently, 450 valid responses were collected and considered for the study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Within our diverse sample of 450 respondents, the gender distribution reveals a balanced representation, with 40% being male and 60% female. The age demographics showcase a predominant presence in the 20-30 age bracket, followed closely by the 30-40 age group, emphasizing the study's appeal to a younger audience. In terms of educational backgrounds, a noteworthy proportion of respondents have achieved either graduate or post-graduate qualifications, reflecting a well-educated participant pool. Moreover, a nuanced exploration of monthly income indicates that a significant portion of the sample, accounting for 52%, falls within the 30000-40000 income range. This detailed analysis is encapsulated in Table 1, providing a comprehensive overview of the diverse and dynamic characteristics exhibited by our study participants.

MEASUREMENT MODEL

The proposed model underwent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure high reliability and validity for structural equation modeling (SEM). Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Reliability were scrutinized and are presented in Table 2. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha through SPSS, revealing favorable results for all items. E-WOM, Credibility, Quality, and Purchase Intention demonstrated robust reliability, each ranging from 0.75 to 0.810, surpassing the 0.6 threshold. A total of 16 items were strategically utilized to gauge the four constructs within the model. To assess the similarity in variance among items within constructs, standardized factor loadings were scrutinized. Factor loadings, ranging from 0.731 to 0.938, affirmed the significant relationship between observed variables and their respective constructs, thereby confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was ascertained by comparing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each variable with the Squared Correlation between variables. This rigorous examination ensured that each construct was distinct from others, reinforcing the discriminant validity of the proposed model. In summary, the measurement model not only demonstrated high reliability but also substantiated convergent and discriminant validity, laying a robust foundation for the subsequent structural equation modeling. The details of these assessments are elucidated

in Table 2.

Table 3: Average Variance Extracted

| | CR | AVE | MSV | ASV | EWOM | IQ | IC | PI |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| EWOM | 0.911 | 0.721 | 0.284 | 0.191 | 0.849 | | | |
| IQ | 0.862 | 0.611 | 0.284 | 0.184 | 0.533 | 0.782 | | |
| IC | 0.817 | 0.527 | 0.189 | 0.124 | 0.312 | 0.409 | 0.726 | |
| PI | 0.919 | 0.739 | 0.189 | 0.104 | 0.240 | 0.402 | 0.435 | 0.861 |

Table 4: Summary of goodness of fit indices

| Model Fit Indices | DF | CFI | GFI | NFI | TLI | RMSEA |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Measurement Model | 1.91 | 0.92 | 0.92 | 0.94 | 0.943 | 0.035 |
| Structural Model | 1.92 | 0.94 | 0.91 | 0.95 | 0.964 | 0.043 |

Table 5: Summary of testing of hypotheses

| Paths | Coefficient | t-value | p-value | Relationship |
|------------|-------------|---------|---------|--------------|
| PI <- EWOM | 0.13 | 0.237 | 0.03 | Confirmed |
| PI <- IQ | 0.22 | 1.75 | 0.02 | Confirmed |
| PI <- IC | 0.87 | 3.43 | 0.00 | Confirmed |

The goodness-of-fit indices, including CFI, GFI, TLI, NFI, and RMSEA, were meticulously examined to assess the adequacy of the measurement model. Satisfactory results are typically indicated by values less than 3, with CFI, NFI, GFI, and TLI exceeding 0.9, and RMSEA not surpassing 0.08. As demonstrated in Table 4, the analysis reveals favorable values for the degrees of freedom (df), CFI, GFI, NFI, TLI, and RMSEA, measuring 1.91, 0.92, 0.92, 0.94, 0.943, and 0.035, respectively. Each of these values falls within the accepted range, affirming the validity of the structural model. The subsequent step involved testing the research hypotheses within the model, as summarized in Table 5. The beta values elucidate the degree of influence exerted by independent variables on dependent variables. All hypotheses were tested positively, with Electronic Word of Mouth, Information Quality, Information Credibility, and Purchase Intention exhibiting different p-values, establishing significant relationships. In essence, the results validate the measurement model's robustness and provide a solid foundation for further hypothesis testing within the research model. The nuanced findings offer insights into the intricate interplay of Electronic Word of Mouth, Information Quality, Information Credibility, and Purchase Intention in the context of the study.

CONCLUSION

This study delves into the influential dynamics surrounding Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) and its impact on consumers' green Purchase Intention. The overarching goal is to unravel the factors shaping individuals' intentions to purchase environmentally friendly products, thus contributing to sustainable practices. Existing research has consistently explored the impact of E-WoM on purchase intentions across various product categories, with positive associations consistently identified. This study echoes these findings, establishing a significant positive relationship between E-WoM and the intention to purchase green products (p-value < 0.05). Moreover, the study sheds light on the pivotal

role played by Information Quality in influencing the purchase of green products, demonstrating a noteworthy and statistically significant relationship (p -value < 0.05). Likewise, Information Credibility emerges as a significant factor, exerting a substantial influence on consumers' intentions to embrace eco-friendly products.

The model developed in this study reaffirms that consumer reviews wield considerable influence in driving the adoption of green products. As consumers increasingly align themselves with environmentally conscious choices, they not only contribute to positive environmental outcomes but also become vocal advocates on various platforms, influencing others to follow suit. In essence, consumer reviews have emerged as a powerful form of communication that surpasses traditional advertising channels. In light of these findings, it is imperative for managers and marketers to strategize effectively, leveraging the potency of consumer reviews in creating awareness and driving the adoption of green products. As consumers increasingly prioritize eco-friendly choices, a strategic emphasis on fostering positive word-of-mouth can amplify the impact of marketing efforts, leading to a more sustainable and environmentally conscious consumer base.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study contributes valuable insights, it is not exempt from certain limitations. The examination of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) in this study focused on a select set of factors. Future researchers, delving into the extensive literature on the subject, can consider exploring additional elements contributing to E-WOM, such as homophily, information quantity, and the utilization of social networking sites. These factors, if incorporated, may offer a more comprehensive understanding of their influence on the purchase intention of green products. Another potential avenue for future research lies in investigating negative Electronic Word of Mouth. While this study primarily explored the positive impact of E-WOM on green product purchase intentions, a comprehensive exploration of negative E-WOM could provide a balanced perspective. Understanding how negative reviews or opinions affect consumers' intentions to adopt environmentally friendly products could unveil crucial insights for marketers and policymakers.

Furthermore, to enhance the generalizability of findings, future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies on a larger scale by drawing substantial sample sizes. This expansion in scope would contribute to the robustness of the research outcomes and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics between E-WOM and the purchase intentions of green products.

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