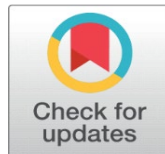


# INFLUENCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (EWOM) ON CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISIONS: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO KOTTAYAM DISTRICT, KERALA

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchasing decisions in the Kottayam district. In the age of digital transformation, when customers rely on the internet and social media, eWOM has become a significant factor in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours. This research utilized a survey method, collecting primary data from 100 respondents through a structured questionnaire. The study found that most consumers (90%) are aware of eWOM and actively search for information online before making a purchase. Shopping websites were identified as the most influential eWOM platform, with reviews being the preferred form of eWOM. The credibility and trustworthiness of the information source were ranked as the most critical factor influencing purchase decisions. Overall, the study concludes that eWOM has a significant and positive influence on the purchasing behaviour of consumers, who rely on it to compare brands, make informed decisions, and build trust.

**Keywords:** Electronic Word of Mouth, Ewom, Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Decision, Online Reviews

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) is the act of sharing information about a product or service among people interacting in the virtual world. It functions as a form of buzz marketing that can become viral if the message is persuasive enough. eWOM includes user-generated content such as reviews, ratings, comments, and testimonials shared across online platforms. It is more scalable, traceable, and persistent compared to face to face WOM, enabling consumers to influence others' decisions across time and geography. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, where messages are ephemeral, eWOM messages remain online over a period. This communication can be any positive or negative statement made by consumers via platforms such as blogs, online reviews, and social media posts.

The growth of the internet provides consumers with the opportunity to share experiences and opinions, thereby influencing the decisions of others through eWOM. Consequently, eWOM has emerged as a powerful promotional tool with increasing relevance in the modern marketing landscape. This study seeks to provide further insight into how the

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emergence of eWOM influences the purchasing behaviour and decision-making of consumers within the Kottayam district.

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To identify the major factors of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that influence the purchase decisions of consumers in Kottayam district.
- 2) To examine the most used eWOM platforms considered by consumers in Kottayam while making purchasing decisions.
- 3) To assess the most preferred form of electronic word of mouth among consumers when purchasing a product.
- 4) To analyse how eWOM shapes the attitudes and behavioural intentions of consumers in Kottayam while purchasing a product.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of research on Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) highlights its growing importance in marketing and consumer behaviour. Companies increasingly perceive eWOM as a powerful tool to understand consumer needs and tailor promotional strategies accordingly (Yang, 2017). eWOM serves as a form of peer influence, where consumer attitudes whether positive or negative shape future purchase intentions by enabling a comparison between a product's actual performance and prior expectations (Yang, 2017). As a result, eWOM has become one of the most influential online information sources, significantly altering the consumer decision-making process (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016).

A central theme across the literature is the credibility of eWOM. Consumers frequently use eWOM to reduce risk and uncertainty when making purchase decisions (Sotiriadis & Van Zyl, 2013). Opinions that are well argued and come from trustworthy sources are more likely to be persuasive (Doh & Hwang, 2009). In fact, Doh and Hwang (2009) reported that 97.9% of participants trusted eWOM before purchasing a product. Additionally, eWOM exchanged through social networking sites has been found to be more effective in influencing purchase intentions than traditional advertising on the same platforms (Wallace et al., 2009). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) defined eWOM as any positive or negative statement made by consumers and made available to a broad audience via the Internet, emphasizing its scale, reach, and accessibility. Notably, the motivation behind eWOM varies positive eWOM is typically driven by personal attitudes, while negative eWOM often stems from social pressure. Several empirical studies have expanded this understanding. Perera, Nayak, and Long (2019) applied Social Cognitive Theory to examine the relationship between eWOM, e-loyalty, and e-purchase behaviour. Their model positioned eWOM as the independent variable, with information credibility, quality, and usefulness acting as mediators. Data from 120 online brand community members showed that eWOM significantly enhances both e-loyalty and purchase intention, particularly when mediated by high-quality and credible information. Bhat and Bhat (2020) conducted a systematic literature review to assess the influence of eWOM on consumers' purchase intentions. While the existing literature confirms the growing relevance of eWOM, their study identified a lack of focused research directly linking eWOM to purchase intention. Their findings underscore the need for future empirical studies targeting this relationship. Al-Ja'afreh and Al-Adaileh (2020) studied the influence of eWOM on purchase intention among young consumers in Malaysia. They found that source credibility, source presence, eWOM quantity, and message attractiveness significantly affect online purchase intentions. This reinforces the role of persuasive and trustworthy content in influencing buying decisions in digital contexts. Azhar, Sutiono, and Wisnalmawati (2021) explored the combined effect of digital marketing and eWOM on purchase decisions and customer satisfaction among Kappy Komputer customers in Yogyakarta. They found that both digital marketing and eWOM positively influence purchase decisions. However, eWOM did not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction, indicating that its influence is more prominent before the purchase rather than after. Although the literature provides compelling evidence that eWOM significantly affects consumer attitudes and purchase intentions across different digital platforms and demographics, a noticeable gap exists in region-specific empirical validation, particularly in the Indian context. While prior studies (e.g., Bhat & Bhat, 2020; Al-Ja'afreh & Al-Adaileh, 2020) highlight the general impact of eWOM on purchase intentions, there remains a gap in understanding how local consumers interpret and respond to eWOM in culturally and demographically unique areas like Kottayam. The role of trust, message credibility, and perceived usefulness in these local contexts remains insufficiently addressed. This study aims to bridge this gap by offering localized insights into the influence of eWOM on consumer purchase decisions in Kottayam District.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a descriptive research design, utilizing a survey method to determine the influence of eWOM on consumer purchase decisions in the Kottayam district.

### 4.2. SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANTS

Data was collected from a sample of 100 respondents using a convenient sampling method. Majority of respondents were female (62%), in the 20–30-year age group (72%) and were students (54%).

### 4.3. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

A structured questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to collect primary data. The questionnaire included sections on demographics, internet usage, awareness and use of eWOM, preferred platforms, and factors influencing purchase decisions. The study also utilized secondary data collected from various journals, books, and websites.

### 4.4. DATA ANALYSIS

The collected primary data was analysed using statistical tools including Percentage Analysis and Likert's Scaling Techniques.

## 5. RESULTS

The analysis of the survey data revealed several key findings regarding consumer interaction with eWOM.

### 5.1. AWARENESS AND USE OF EWOM

A significant majority of respondents (90%) search the internet before purchasing a product, and an equal percentage (90%) are aware of eWOM.

### 5.2. CONSIDERATION OF EWOM WHILE PURCHASING A PRODUCT

Table 1

Opinion	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Always	41	41%
Frequently	19	19%
Sometimes	30	30%
Never	10	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note. Source: Primary data collected for this study.

As shown in Table 1, 41% of respondents always consider eWOM when making a purchase, and another 19% do so frequently. 30% of respondents opined that they sometimes consider eWOM at the time of purchase

### 5.3. PREFERRED FORMS AND PLATFORMS OF EWOM

Reviews (41%) and ratings (36%) were the most preferred forms of eWOM. Shopping websites were the most influential platform (71%), followed by social media platforms (56%).

## 5.4. RANKING OF FACTORS IN EWOM INFLUENCING PURCHASE DECISIONS

**Table 2**

Factor	Weighted Average	Rank
Credibility and trustworthiness of comments/reviews/websites	18.67	1
Source of information	16.67	2
Nature of information (positive/negative)	13.5	3
Type of websites	11.25	4
Number of posted messages (volume)	10.14	5
Social relationship/opinions of members	9.92	6
Nature of product/services recommended	9.82	7

Note. Source: Primary data collected for this study.

The analysis identified the credibility and trustworthiness of the source as the most important factor influencing purchase decisions (see Table 2). Respondents also agreed that eWOM platforms help them compare brands (mean score of 4.42 on a 5-point Likert scale) and that the credibility of product information affects their purchase decision (mean score of 4.01).

## 6. DISCUSSION

This study's findings indicate a strong and pervasive influence of eWOM on the purchasing behaviour of consumers in Kottayam district. The high level of awareness and daily internet use among respondents shows a digitally engaged population that proactively seeks information before making purchases. The preference for reviews on shopping websites suggests that consumers integrate their information-seeking and purchasing activities on the same platforms.

The most critical finding is the paramount importance of credibility and trustworthiness. Consumers are not passively consuming all online information; they are actively evaluating the source of the information before allowing it to influence their decisions. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of trust in eWOM communication (Doh & Hwang, 2009). The attitude and behaviour of consumers are positively affected by eWOM, which empowers them to compare products, verify information, and ultimately make more confident decisions. A significant number of consumers also contribute back to this digital ecosystem by providing their own reviews after a purchase, ensuring its continued relevance and vitality.

In conclusion, this study confirms that eWOM is a major force in contemporary consumerism. It was observed that most consumers are aware of eWOM and use its different forms to guide their purchasing. The positive influence of eWOM on consumer attitudes and behaviours underscores its importance for both consumers and marketers in the digital age.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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