

Consumer Intention and the Role of eWOM in the Movie Industry



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ABSTRACT: This study attempts to examine the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on consumer intent to purchase movie tickets. Using various methods, including ANOVA and linear regression, this research seeks to elucidate the influence of eWOM on consumer decision-making in the context of deciding which movie ticket to buy. Findings indicate a significantly positive relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, in correlation with the role of consumer trust, consistent with prior research on the power of online reviews. Further, the study reveals age as a moderating variable, showing variations in the effect of eWOM across demographic segments. By illustrating the correlation between consumer intent and eWOM within the film industry, this research offers insights for industry professionals to adapt their strategies based on audience preferences

KEYWORDS: Movie industry; e-WOM; social media; Consumer Intention; Trust; ANOVA

I. INTRODUCTION

"No communication can be more powerful than the simple act of one person talking to another." (Barber & Wallace, 2009)

The rise of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has fundamentally changed how consumers engage with businesses, especially in fields like entertainment. eWOM involves using digital platforms such as social media, blogs, and forums to share information about products or services among users (C. L. Hsu et al., 2013; Khan et al., 2024; Patricia et al., 2023), particularly in the movie industry, where word-of-mouth strongly influences ticket sales and public opinion. This article aims to examine the influence of eWOM on intentions toward movies and shape their decision-making process when selecting films. This study explores various factors that contribute to the effectiveness of eWOM in influencing consumer behaviour and discusses potential implications for the movie industry.

Understanding the motivations behind movie consumers generating eWOM, the impact of eWOM on moviegoers, and where eWOM can be found online are essential aspects to explore (Ramírez-castillo et al., 2021). In the arena of new product development, Word-of-mouth may play a particularly important role because awareness must be created, and consumers need information when they are deciding whether to purchase a product they are not familiar with (L. C. Hsu, 2022). As the usage of the Internet has increased over the years, people are sharing all types of experiences to the extent that they go viral. Many websites offer discussion forums and threads where users can post information and exchange opinions. This new environment not only increases the likelihood that consumers will use WOM to make decisions but also gives researchers the opportunity to collect real information about WOM (Liu, 2006).

It is imperative to study the impact of eWOM on today's film industry as it has a profound impact on consumer behaviour and film revenue. Research shows that eWOM volume and sentiment are key factors that influence video sales and consumers' decisions to watch videos. For example, previous research has shown that the level of eWOM is positively related to revenue from movie ticket sales (Stevens et al., 2017). Additionally, there is an ongoing research debate about how eWOM, which represents the favourability of product reviews, may influence sales. While some studies support this claim for different products, others have shown inconsistent results on the impact of eWOM on box office sales and movie ticket revenue.

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Furthermore, it is suggested that discrepancies in eWOM, reflecting inconsistencies between reviews, could also influence product sales (Y. L. Chiu et al., 2019). Past research proves that consumers regard WOM as much more reliable and trustworthy than advertisements in traditional media, such as television, radio, and print (Cheung & Lee, 2012).

However, a lot of recent studies in this field are mainly focused on people between the ages of 20-40. Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap and focus this study mainly on the young adult population of people between the ages of 18-25. Previous studies in this area have focused mainly on people aged 20-40. This age group was chosen because they are an avid user of technology and social media and were the main target groups for movie marketers. The focus of this research, however, is undergraduate students in an urban area aged between 18-25 years. This change is important because young adults are using social media more and are influenced by what their friends recommend. Marketers need to know this to target young people better and make their marketing plans work. Also, understanding how young adults respond to eWOM can help filmmakers make movies that young people like more, which can help them do better at the box office.

Studying the effect of eWOM on the film industry has various purposes. The film industry is extremely driven by consumer behaviour and trends, and eWOM has emerged as a significant factor explaining these assumptions. By examining how eWOM affects movie preferences, researchers can provide recommendations to be acted upon for the industry to mould their marketing efforts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies on similar topics have highlighted the impact of eWOM on consumer behaviour, especially when it comes to box office success. Researchers have emphasized the role of eWOM in shaping how consumers perceive, prefer and intend to watch films, underscoring its importance for both filmmakers and marketers (Y. L. Chiu et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019). Moreover, the widespread presence of eWOM on media platforms and online review sites has transformed how audiences engage with movie-related content and make decisions about watching films (Stevens et al., 2017). Through a comprehensive review of existing literature on eWOM and its implications for the movie industry, this research endeavours to contribute to a deeper comprehension of how digital communication shapes consumer behaviour and informs film marketing strategies.

Compared to traditional WOM, the credibility of eWOM is more scrutinized by consumers, as they will only believe reviews they believe are credible. Previous research has shown that trustworthiness is an important prerequisite for eWOM use. Such research has shown that customers' purchasing decisions can be predicted based on the credibility of the information source. Users who find a review or recommendation valuable have no reason to ignore it (Lee & Enriquez, 2016).

A. Purchase Intention

Consumer intention refers to an individual's readiness and willingness to engage in a particular behaviour, such as making a purchase or taking a specific action (Yan et al., 2018). In the context of this study, consumer intention serves as a crucial variable in understanding how online communication influences moviegoers' decisions to watch films. In the past literature, intentions have been evaluated in terms of sharing online opinions and recommendations (Erkan & Evans, 2018; Patricia et al., 2023). Further, social media reviews and discussions have played a crucial role in deciding on the product purchase (Aslam et al., 2019; Nofal et al., 2022). The influence of discussions on Twitter is also duly noted (Baek et al., 2014; Musallam & Magalhães, 2012; Yolanda et al., 2023). Researchers have also highlighted that the Intention to rely on social media discussions is typically seen in young consumers (Mensah et al., 2020). The more the movie is talked about on different social media platforms and discussion forums, the more it impacts intentions to watch. (Chih et al., 2013; Yan et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding consumer intention based on eWOM is essential for filmmakers and marketers to tailor their strategies effectively and enhance audience engagement in the competitive landscape of the movie industry.

B. Electronic- Word of Mouth

eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, current or former customers about a product or company that is shared over the Internet with multiple people and institutions" (Meenakshy et al., 2020). Overall, online customer reviews are considered an effective indicator of WOM and can influence consumer decision-making (Penz et al., 2018).

Many empirical findings support this view. For example, Penz et al. (2018) show that online customer reviews have a significantly positive impact on product sales in the video game industry. Liu (2006) found that online film reviews have significant predictive power over total and weekly box office revenue. Recent meta-analysis studies (Albayrak & Ceylan, 2021; do Rosário & Loureiro, 2021; Kuo et al., 2015) confirmed that eWOM (e.g. the number of reviews and their value) has a positive influence on multiplatform sales, product features and measurement parameters. It is, therefore, clear that eWOM is playing an increasingly important role in consumer purchasing decisions (Y. L. Chiu et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study aims to test the influence of quality, quantity, and the type (positive or negative) of eWOM on the intentions.

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C. Trust

Trust is a critical component in the relationship between consumers and businesses, particularly in the context of marketing. In this study, trust serves as a significant variable that influences consumer behaviour and decision-making processes. Consumer trust in eWOM sources, such as online reviews, social media recommendations, and influencer endorsements, plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase intentions towards movies (Patricia et al., 2023). Customers who give a brand a high trust score are three times more likely to accidentally remain loyal to it (Molinillo et al., 2020).

The study tests trust in online reviews and discussions irrespective of gender (Chatterjee et al., 2022; Phua et al., 2018). At the same time, trust is also dependent on the accuracy of the information (Chopra et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2023; Weber et al., 2021). Researchers have also studied the number of likes on social media posts to decide on the product (Pandey et al., 2018; Sulthana & Vasantha, 2019). This tendency also underlies the trust in the people writing reviews online (T. Chiu et al., 2016). Therefore, understanding the dynamics of trust in eWOM can provide valuable insights for industry professionals to enhance their marketing strategies, build credibility with audiences, and foster long-term relationships with consumers.

III. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Drawing inspiration from existing research on eWOM and consumer behaviour, the present study proposes a conceptual model to understand the influence of eWOM on consumer movie purchase intention, with consumer trust in eWOM acting as a mediating factor. Figure 1 gives the conceptual model for the study.

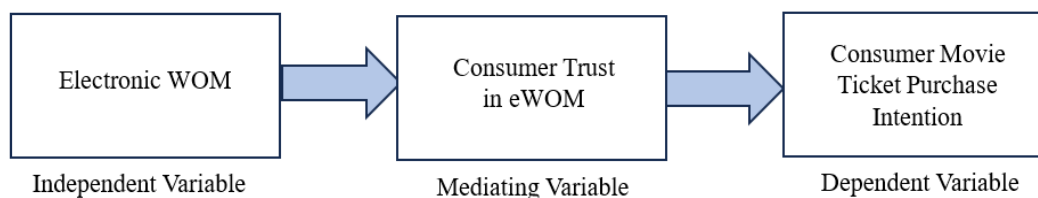


Figure 1: Conceptual Model for the Study (Source: Authors' work)

This model posits that eWOM, encompassing various online sources like reviews, recommendations, and discussions, shapes consumer trust in eWOM as a source of movie information. Consumers who rely more heavily on eWOM are likely to develop greater trust in the information gleaned from these sources. Subsequently, this trust in eWOM is expected to influence consumer movie purchase intention positively. Thus, the study aims at testing the following hypothesis:

H1: eWOM positively impacts movie ticket purchase intention.

Next, the study also posits that the influence of eWOM on enhanced trust in online reviews is significant. Research shows that consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from sources they perceive as credible and trustworthy (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). This study aims to uncover how trust enhances the intention to purchase movie tickets based on consumer eWOM.

H2: Consumer trust enhances the effect of eWOM on movie ticket purchase intention.

Since several studies conducted so far have assumed that the younger generation is more influenced by eWOM than to older (Iyer et al., 2017; Johnson Jorgensen & Ha, 2019), it is imperative to test whether there is any significant difference in age groups 20 years and less and age groups more than 20 years. Younger audiences are often considered "digital natives" who may be more susceptible to eWOM effects compared to older audiences. This study will provide insight into possible generational differences in eWOM trust and its impact on movie ticket purchase decisions.

At the same time, gender differences have also been significantly noted in previous studies (Phan et al., 2019; Shoaib et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2019). However, some other studies have not been able to establish any difference (Abubakar et al., 2020). Therefore, this research aims to test the gender differences in the intention to be influenced by eWOM. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: The age groups moderate the influence of eWOM on movie ticket purchase intentions.

H4: The gender differences moderates the influence of eWOM on movie ticket purchase intentions.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a quantitative approach to assess the impact of (e-WOM on movie ticket purchase intention. Quantitative methods are well-suited for analyzing numerical data collected from surveys and questionnaires, allowing for statistical testing of hypotheses and generalizations to a broader population (Hair et al., 2019).

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Data Collection

A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants. Convenience sampling prioritizes accessibility over strict randomization. While acknowledging the limitations of this approach in achieving a perfectly representative sample, it allowed for data collection from readily available participants in colleges located in Mumbai and other metropolitan cities. A survey was done with the help of a questionnaire with 15 questions pertaining to intentions, eWOM, and trust. The sampling unit for this study was individual moviegoers. A total of 205 responses were collected. Future studies would ideally employ random sampling methods to achieve a larger and more statistically robust sample size (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

A self-administered questionnaire is used to capture data on the research variables. The questionnaire included items to assess e-WOM reliance, trust in eWOM, and movie ticket purchase intention on a Likert scale. Google Forms was used as the online survey platform to administer the questionnaire to the participants. Table 1 shows the demographic details.

Table 1: Demographic data on the basis of form responses

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Below 20	108	52.682
Above 20	97	47.317
Gender		
Male	116	56.586
Female	89	43.414

Source: Authors' work

V. DATA ANALYSIS

The study first conducted a regression analysis, taking eWOM and trust as independent and Intention as the dependent variable. Table 2 shows the descriptives of the data, which shows the maximum agreement for eWOM. However, all the variables show moderate agreement, and the responses are reasonably homogenous.

Further, both independent variables show a moderate 0.661 correlation between them, which is good enough to proceed with the regression. The model summary shows the regression test results in Table 3. The results of step-wise regression show a significant impact of eWOM on intention, which is significantly enhanced with the presence of trust.

Table 2: Model Summary

SN	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.719 ^a	0.517	0.514	0.600	0.517	216.882	1	203	0.000
2	0.752 ^b	0.565	0.561	0.570	0.049	22.631	1	202	0.000

a. Independent variable – eWOM

b. Independent Variable – Trust

Dependent Variable - Intention

Source: Authors' work

Overall, the model explains a variation of 56.1% in intention to purchase movie tickets due to eWOM and trust in eWOM. Further, the ANOVA table shows the significant F value, supporting H1 and H2.

Table 3: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	78.012	1	78.012	216.882	0.000 ^b
	Residual	73.019	203	0.360		
	Total	151.031	204			
2	Regression	85.369	2	42.684	131.311	0.000 ^c

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	Residual	65.663	202	0.325		
	Total	151.031	204			

a. Dependent Variable: Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), eWOM

c. Predictors: (Constant), eWOM, Trust

Source: Authors' work

Also, the coefficients given by the regression give the following regression equations:

$$Intention=0.609+0.808 eWOM$$

$$Intention=0.394+0.589 eWOM+0.312 Trust$$

Table 4: Independent Sample Test for Age Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Intention	Equal variances assumed	0.535	0.465	2.312	203	0.022	0.275	0.119	0.040	0.510	
	Equal variances not assumed			2.294*	191.390	0.023	0.275	0.120	0.038	0.512	
eWOM	Equal variances assumed	2.936	0.088	1.916	203	0.057	0.204	0.106	-0.006	0.414	
	Equal variances not assumed			1.900	189.291	0.059	0.204	0.107	-0.008	0.416	
Trust	Equal variances assumed	0.014	0.907	0.589	203	0.556	0.070	0.114	-0.157	0.291	
	Equal variances not assumed			0.588	198.635	0.557	.06699	.11393	-.15768	0.292	

Source: Authors' work

Table 5: Independent Sample Test for Gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Intention	Equal variances assumed	0.134	0.714	2.183	203	0.030	0.262	0.120	0.025	0.499	
	Equal variances not assumed			2.173*	186.210	0.031	0.262	0.121	0.024	0.500	
eWOM	Equal variances assumed	0.322	0.571	1.407	203	0.161	0.151	0.108	-0.061	0.364	
	Equal variances not assumed			1.396	183.697	0.164	0.151	0.108	-0.063	0.365	
Trust	Equal variances assumed	0.919	0.339	0.685	203	0.494	0.078	0.114	-0.147	0.304	
	Equal variances not assumed			0.678	181.318	0.499	0.078	0.116	-0.150	0.307	

Source: Authors' work

Next, the independent t-test is conducted to identify group differences between age groups and genders. Table 4 shows that there are significant differences between age groups for intention to purchase movie tickets based on eWOM, and it is more for the age group 20 or less. Therefore, H3 is supported.

Similarly, for gender, only Intention to purchase movie tickets due to eWOM is higher in male respondents than female respondents. Table 5 shows the independent tests for genders, supporting H4.

However, the results could not find any significant difference between the eWOM acceptance and trust in reviews and discussions. Nonetheless, its impact on movie ticket purchase intentions is more in young and male respondents.

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VI. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Through the study presented in the present article, several key findings have been established that contribute to both academic and practical implications within the movie industry. The study confirms that eWOM, encompassing online reviews, recommendations, and discussions, significantly impacts consumer intentions to purchase movie tickets (Chiu et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019). The research also highlights the crucial role of consumer trust in eWOM as a mediating factor, further strengthening the relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Patricia et al., 2023). The results of the study also reveal that the demographic of young adults (18-25 years old) are especially susceptible to the influence of eWOM, suggesting that movie marketers should give priority to digital platforms and strategies that resonate with this age group (Johnson Jorgensen & Ha, 2019). Additionally, male respondents demonstrated a higher purchase intention to buy movie tickets in comparison to female respondents, emphasizing the significance of taking gender disparities in eWOM's influence into account. (Phan et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2019).

The findings of the research have extensive implications. For scholars and academics, the study can be beneficial in expanding their understanding of electronic word of mouth and how it affects consumer behaviour in the context of the film industry. The study examines young adults and explores gender differences, which can offer valuable insights and contribute to future research endeavours in this field. Movie marketers and decision-makers can leverage these insights in a managerial way to develop customized marketing tactics that optimally utilize eWOM to reach and impact their target audiences across different geographies to improve audience engagement and, in turn, boost ticket sales. Online communication needs to be transparent and authentic, as credibility plays an important role in eWOM, as highlighted by the study.

VII. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

In conclusion, with the use of a quantitative approach and concentrating on a particular demographic, the study confirms the significant impact of eWOM on young adults' movie purchase decisions. Further, the importance of consumer trust in eWOM enhances the varying influence of eWOM across different age groups and genders.

However, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The use of a convenience sampling technique may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Future research could employ random sampling methods to ensure a more representative sample. Additionally, the study's focus on a specific age group and geographic location may restrict the applicability of the findings to other demographics or cultural contexts. Further research could explore the impact of eWOM on diverse populations and examine the influence of cultural factors on eWOM's effectiveness. Purchase intention is only a part of the broad topic of consumer behaviour. The Research does not focus on other external variables that affect moviegoers' behaviour like reviewer characteristics, movie promotions, Peer group influence etc. Despite these limitations, this study contributes significantly to the understanding of eWOM's role in shaping consumer behaviour in the movie industry and provides a solid foundation for future research in this field.

Future researchers may extend the findings of this study by testing the impact on diverse demographics, such as people from different cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic groups, or geographic locations. Future research can also explore the less researched areas like social media eWOM influence and the influence of content-sharing platforms such as YouTube. Further, the impact of eWOM on movie purchase intentions can be assessed over time, particularly in the context of long-term marketing campaigns or franchise films using a longitudinal research design.

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