

Effects of Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Consumers' Purchase Intentions Through Brand Association in Iran Perspective

Yousef Sharifpour^{1*}, Mohd Noor Azli Bin Ali Khan¹, Abbas Mardani¹, Khezer Azizi²

¹ Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

² Faculty of Management, Islamic Azad University, Sardasht, Iran

Email Address

vian_389@yahoo.com (Yousef Sharifpour), m-nazli@utm.my (Mohd Noor Azli Bin Ali Khan), abbas.mardani.2000@gmail.com (Abbas Mardani), Azizi4929@gmail.com (Khezer Azizi)

*Correspondence: vian_389@yahoo.com

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Abstract:

Background/Objectives: Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a strong advertising tool for consumers, which affects their assessment of various existing brands and products such as mobile brands through online communication channels. This study aims to explain the influence of eWOM on consumers' purchase intentions through brand association in Iran perspective, focusing on Samsung mobile brand. **Methods/Statistical analysis:** The group studied is a sample of 384 Samsung brand users among students of Tehran Islamic Azad University in Iran who answered questionnaire survey. SPSS program has been used to generate descriptive and inferential statistics while AMOS program has been used for path analysis. **Findings:** The result from this study indicates that eWOM has significant positive effect on brand association and purchase intention. and the effects of brand association on purchase intention were statistically significant and positive. So, the all proposed hypothesis are accepted. **Improvements/Applications:** This study contributes to the exploration on the importance of eWOM on purchase intention through brand association.

Keywords:

Electronic Word of Mouth, Purchase Intention, Brand Association

1. Introduction

The Internet makes available several avenues for consumers to discuss their opinions, and Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) propagates it at an unmatched rate and at a much cheaper rate than the conventional WOM. With the promotion of the Internet, eWOM provides a fertile marketing field [20]. At present, consumers can obtain the required information about a specific product conveniently at a much faster rate due to the development and application of Web 2.0 in social media such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, which enhances consumers' experience since Web

2.0 emphasizes on user-generated content [18, 35, 40, 46]. The recent development allows consumers, through network facilities, to communicate with the sellers and get the needed information about a specific product.

Decision making is a multifaceted process in which both marketers and researchers are interested. Numerous factors like the personality of individuals, convincing advertisements, information accessibility, personal experiences, persuasive salespersons, and third party opinion directly, indirectly, or interactively affect the final purchasing choice of consumers [9, 21]. Basically, eWOM provides a channel for consumers to share their perceptions, views, or feedbacks about the businesses, goods, or services that they used or received [14]. Since consumers highly regard other consumers' experience, eWOM has a significant influence on consumers purchase intention – eWOM increases their intention to purchase if the product received good feedback and reduces their intention to purchase if the product received bad review [49].

Prior studies have examined the social media user's motive on eWOM behavior in various eWOM platforms such as blogs and the way information gathered through eWOM affects consumers' intent to purchase, especially on specific product's reviewed through eWOM [20, 27, 32]. It is found that there are two sets of consumers who use eWOM: those who want to share product information and consumer experience and those who seek for heuristic information [4, 49, 44]. Studies also find that brand names play a role of substitute for a specific product when consumers are looking for information online [1]. While there are many scholars who have examined the effect of eWOM on consumers' purchase intentions and the effect of brand equity on consumers' purchase intentions, and more research is needed to better understand the influence of eWOM on consumers' purchase intentions through brand association, which is the aim of this paper [5, 31, 42].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Electronic Word of Mouth

Internet, as the most important communication platform, is also a great marketing platform for businesses to promote their brands and increase brand awareness among consumers. eWOM is the result of communication activities among brand consumers on the Internet; it is also a highly effective marketing strategy [10].

Research on the influence of eWOM is divided into two levels: individual and market [30]. The market-level research looks at the effect of eWOM on firm's performance, specifically on revenue. This type of research usually employs accounting data [10, 14]. On the individual-level, research on eWOM is usually concentrated the influence of eWOM on individual purchasing behavior and individual purchasing intention [31, 43].

eWOM generally refers to negative or positive statements made by real or potential consumers regarding a certain product, which is made accessible for a large number of individuals and organizations through the internet [20]. eWOM “electronic consumer-to-consumer interaction regarding a brand or product” is performed through various social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube and Twiter as well as specific platforms that discuss specific products such as blog articles, boards and user review boards [38, 13, 17].

A recent survey found that most consumers perceive eWOM from social media channels and other platforms to be as trustworthy as brand websites [39]. Hence, businesses are urged to organize their image on social networks, rather than simply advertise online.

2.2. Consumers' Purchase Intentions

Researchers have established that purchase intention significantly determines the likelihood that a consumer will actually shop for a specific goods or service. Thus, purchase intention is a potent indicator of consumers' willingness to seek the fulfillment of their desires. It is also the motive force that catalysis consumers to go through the shopping ritual, including collecting information about the goods or services, weighing up the choices available at the moment, selecting the choice closest to their preferences, and making the final decision to buy [3, 24]. Advertising celebrity's popularity, attractiveness, and expertise can appeal consumer's attraction and improve consumer's purchase intention [11].

Today, consumers participate in eWOM before making purchasing choices. Following the development and growth of Web 2.0, social media networks have become a popular place for consumers to search for information on other consumers' buying experience and their assessment about the products based on their expectation and value consideration [28]. eWOM enables information to be spread and gathered at a very quick pace and helps reducing detail asymmetry about similar products of different brands. Research also finds that community factor is associated with different effect and response of eWOM participants [20, 36].

eWOM's acceptance by consumers who is searching for specific product or brand information is affected by writing skill of the eWOM's reviewers [7]. The skill and ability of eWOM's reviewer to persuade readers to believe in their review has a significant impact on readers' purchasing intention [33]. Consumers rely upon belief to get over high-level threats associated with Internet transaction [44]. As a result, belief impacts purchasing options. Reliability is an element of belief. If clients believe that review is honest and reliable, consumers' purchasing intention is higher [47].

2.3. Brand Association

Brand association is favorable sentiments of a consumer towards the brand in view of the relative level of brand quality [23]. For that reason, customers are readily spent on expensive items which are associated with certain brands that they favor of Bao and Sheng [8]. There are three types of brand association: attitudes (consumer's overall evaluation of a brand), benefits (the personal value and meanings that consumers attach to the product or service) and attributes (how directly a brand relates to product or service performance) [26, 27].

Brand association improves consumers' intention to purchase, brand equity as well as brand loyalty [12, 22, 41]. Atilgan argue that the more consumers could relate towards an item, the more devotion of the consumers is toward a brand [6]. There are a few factors that could influence brand association among consumers such as pictures retaining [25, 26, 37], product quality and consumers' satisfaction [29].

2.4. Mobile Telecommunication Industry in Iran

Iranian Mobile Telecommunication Company or MCI is the first and the largest mobile operator in Iran. Mobile industry can be as one of the most important

industries in Iran as evidenced by the MCI IPO in 2010, which was recorded as the largest IPO value in the Iranian OTC equity market's history [50]. consequently, Mobile industry can be as one of the vital industries in Iran. for this reason, therefore, in late decades, this industry has drastically changed the way of life and human behaviors. The Samsung brand is decided with the end goal of this examination since there is experimental proof concerning the buy and utilization of the brand in Iran.

3. Conceptual Framework

According to the theory of individuals' intentions, individuals' attitude and social image are antecedent of behavioral intention [2, 16]. Social image and perception on a brand or product delivered by people close to the consumer like family members' and friends has influence on consumers' purchase intention [48].

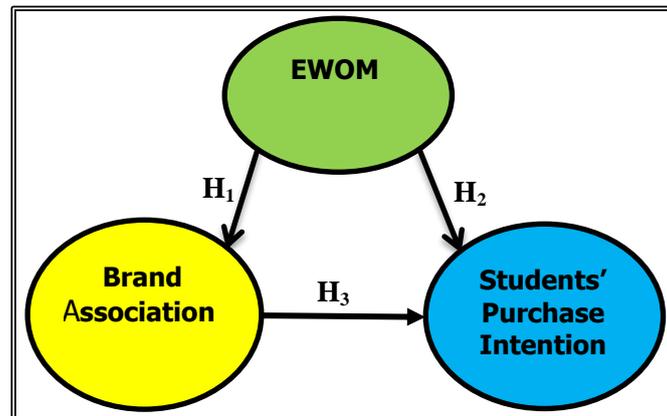


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

According to the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1, the hypotheses are as follows:

H1: There is a positive relationship between eWOM and brand association.

H2: There is a relationship between eWOM and consumers' purchase intentions.

H3: There is a positive relationship between brand association and consumer purchase intentions.

4. Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of eWOM on students purchase intentions through brand association in Iran, using Samsung as the brand subject. This study uses applied research method. The data was collected using questionnaire survey, which was developed based on seven-item Likert-type (strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree). The number of items used to measure each variable and their references are shown in Table 1. SPSS and AMOS program were used to analyze the data.

Table 1. The number of items and source for each variable.

Variable	Items	Source
Electronic word-of-mouth	7	[15, 29]
Brand association	5	[1, 39]
Students purchase intention	4	[11, 12, 26]

Table 2 shows the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient values for “Electronic word-of-mouth”, “Brand association” and “Students purchase intention”. As indicated in table 2, the figures in the table are among the acceptable values and the confirmatory factor. Outcomes of the goodness of fit values have proven to be at a sufficient level as well ($\chi^2/df=2.127$, CFI=0.968, RMSEA=0.075).

Table 2. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient values for each variable.

Scales	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Electronic word-of-mouth	7	.910
Brand association	5	.898
Students purchase intention	4	.895

4.1. The Statistical Pattern and the Society

The samples of the experiment were picked randomly and their total number was 384; and since the number of students using Samsung brand in Islamic Azad University of Tehran is unknown, the following formula was used to filter the sample.

$$n \geq \frac{Z^2 \frac{\alpha}{2} \times P \times q}{d^2} = \frac{1.96^2 \times .05 \times 0.5}{0.05^2} = 384$$

In the above formula, sampling has been done with 95 percent of confidence level.

5. Findings and Interpretation

Of a total sample of 384 respondents, 50.7 percent (195) were male and 49.3 percent (189) were female. The majority of respondents were Bachelor's degree (52.3%), in due to most students were undergoing undergraduate courses and other levels were respectively Master degree (33.1) and PhD (14.6). The majority of the students that use of Samsung brand mobile were between 3 and 5 years (32.5 and minority of the students that use of Samsung brand mobile were less than 1 years (10.7). Table 3 shows demographic of the participant's including gender, level of education and number of years they are using the brand.

Table 3. Demographics of Participants.

Variable	Scope	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	195	50.7
	female	189	49.3
Level of education	Bachelor's degree	201	52.3
	Master degree	127	33.1
	PhD	56	14.6
Years using the brand	Less than 1 years	41	10.7
	Between 1 and 3 years	106	27.6
	Between 3 and 5 years	125	32.5
	More than 5 years	112	29.2

In view of the most extreme likelihood (ML) method. Those essential states expected to the utilization of ML estimation (Byrne, 2001) are met or closely approximated in the study. Further, the sample is sufficiently large (n 384 cases), In those recommended size of 200 cases, those scale from claiming watched variables may be continuous, what's more no violations for multivariate typicality would discovered in the study reactions [34]. Likewise exhibited in table 4, those dependability of the estimation things might have been checked utilizing Cronbach's a with survey those interior consistency of the constructs in the connected modell.

Those level about interior consistency for every construct was acceptable, with the value of a ranging from 0.895 to 0.910, which exceeded the minimum hurdle of 0.60 [19]. All measurement items had standardized loading estimates of 0.5 or higher (ranging from 0.581 to 0.811) at the level of 0.05, indicating the convergent validity of the measurement model. Construct reliability was verified to estimate convergent validity; each construct had acceptable construct reliability, with the estimates ranging from 0.801 to 0.836 [19].

Table 4. Psychometric properties of measures.

variables	Item	Standardized loading	t-Statistic	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Electronic word of mouth	eWom1	.804	9.846	5.42	1.401	.910
	eWOM2	.749	8.741	4.72	1.173	
	eWOM3	.724	8.721	4.41	1.162	
	eWOM4	.811	9.863	5.54	1.493	
	eWOM5	.693	8.104	4.27	1.115	
	eWOM6	.745	8.739	4.69	1.165	
	eWOM7	.790	9.815	5.15	1.385	
Brand association	BI1	.691	8.101	4.24	1.112	.898
	BI2	.581	7.237	4.02	1.075	
	BI3	.720	8.717	4.37	1.153	
	BI4	.749	8.741	4.72	1.173	
	BI5	.683	7.925	4.19	1.096	
Students purchase intention	PI1	.696	8.109	4.29	1.124	.895
	PI2	.742	8.737	4.65	1.163	
	PI3	.754	8.749	4.76	1.172	
	PI4	.711	8.703	4.32	1.146	

Notes: EWOM, electronic word of mouth; BI, brand image; PI, purchase intention

Figure 2 indicates the in general logical power, the standardized path regression coefficients that show the direct impact of the predictor upon the predicted latent constructs for the model, also connected t-values of the paths of the research model. The model fit indices of the structural model and the cut-off value of those fit indices are presented in Tables 4. The goodness-of fit statistics indicate that those structural model fit the information sensibly great. The three-item model prepared a (χ^2/df 2.127). Same time the in general χ^2 to this estimation model was significant (p, 0:05), it will be great established that this detail is sensitive to large sample sizes (e. G. Hair et al., 1998). To alleviate the sensitivity of the χ^2 statistics, the value of χ^2 is commonly divided by the degrees of freedom. The re-estimated χ^2 value was 2.127 and this new value is within an acceptable cut-off value range, from 1.0 to 3.0. The goodness of fit index (CFI 0.968, 1 maximum fit), fit index Tucker-Lewis index (TLI 0.962, 1 maximum fit), comparative fit index (GFI .0964, with 1 indicating maximum fit), comparative the comparative fit index (NFI 0.932, with 1 indicating maximum fit). Finally, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA 0.075, with values, 0.08 indicating good fit), one of the indices best suited to our model with a large sample, indicated that the structural model was a reasonable fit.

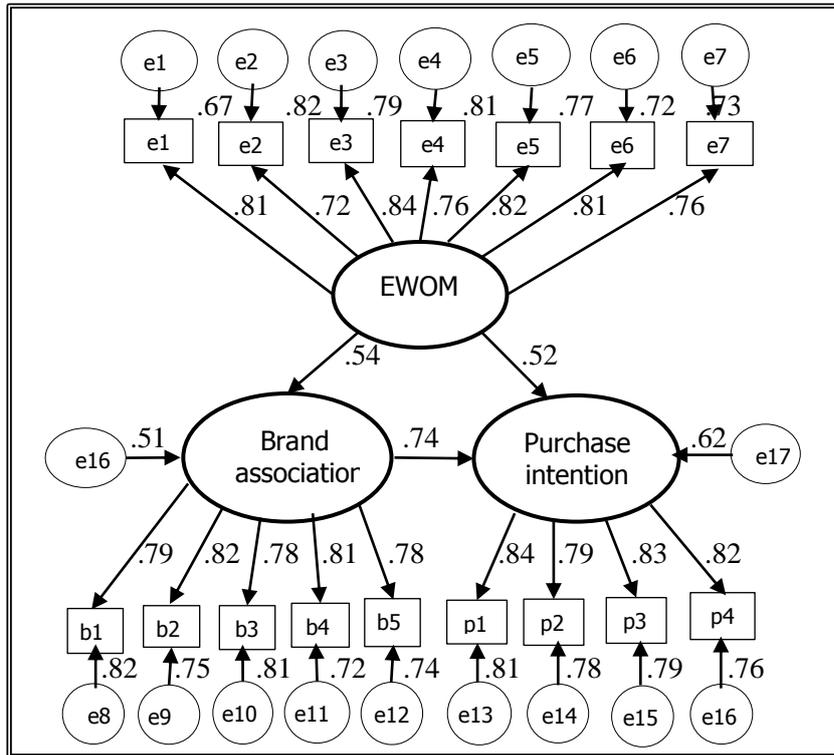


Figure 2. The diagram of the research model.

Table 5. Model fit statistics.

Structural model	Fit statistics	Cut-off value
χ^2/df	2.127	
p-value	< 0.05	
Normed χ^2	1.876	1.0 –3.0
CFI	0.968	> 0.90
TLI	0.962	> 0.90
GFI	.0964	> 0.90
NFI	0.932	> 0.90
RMR	0.49	< 0.50
RMSEA	0.075	< 0.08

Note: Indicates good fit

Based on the result as shown in Figure 2 and table 6 it is proven that eWOM has significant effect on brand association with 0.431, and brand association has significant effect on purchasing intentions with 0.872. Also, eWOM has a significant effect on the students’ intentions on purchasing a product in this study with .0641. Among the three relationships tested confidence level was 99% or ($p < 0/01$), and in the research model, independent variables explain 67% ($R^2 = 0,67$) of the variability of purchase intention.

Table 6. Hypothesis Test Results.

Hypothesis	Standardized Estimates	Results
There is a positive relationship between EWOM and Brand association.	**0.431	Supported
There is a relationship between EWOM and consumers’ purchase intentions.	**0.872	Supported
There is a positive relationship between brand association and consumer purchase intentions.	**0.641	Supported

** = confidence level 99% or ($p < 0/01$)

Table 4 confirms all of the hypothesis of the research.

6. Limitation of the Study

The result of this study is based on specific brand, Samsung, among the students of Islamic Azad University of Tehran. Therefore, it could not be generalized for other brands on community. Future research could look into the effect of eWOM and consumer purchase intention through other dimension of brand equity like brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty, etc.

7. Conclusions

The aim of the current study is to examine the effect of eWOM on two understudied factors, purchase intention and also brand association. The location of the study is in Tehran city, Iran and the understudied brand is Samsung mobile. To be able to completely comprehend eWOM, it is vital to understand its genesis. eWOM is the result of social media interaction (usually positive) among brand consumers. eWOM promotion offers somewhat low cost, focus on promotion, and quick and high reaction. It also provides an unmatched chance for people to link both locally and globally. The concept of eWOM has drawn a pronounced interest as the result of the development of Web 2.0. The WOM process of advertising has existed since the era of trade and barter, and it has been an inestimable important part of the marketing industry, since research largely supports on the claim of how WOM affects a large number of purchase intentions. Moreover, both practical experience and Past exploration recommended that to an eWOM context, consumer are especially interested in writing and reading pleasant Furthermore upsetting encounters. Consequently, starting with a marketer's perspective, the question arose of what impacts eWOM may have on response variables that are relevant in marketing. A reaction variable that assumes a crucial role in marketing but has not been considered in the context of impacts of eWOM communication yet, is brand association. Therefore, it stood to reason to develop the available body of research in the field of effects of eWOM communication by introducing the concept of brand association in this context and investigating possible impacts of e-WOM. These researchers also argue that it does influence consumer behavior more than the marketer-controlled communication as it is believed to be more credible and trustworthy. This is why more attention needs to be paid to the literature in this field, to see the effect of this influence in both cultural and regional contexts. The results will not only be used by respective scholars, but will also be useful for marketers to develop their brands based on users' profile in different regions. With regards to the above debate, Iran has been chosen as the understudied country as it is located among developing countries with unique culture.

In addition, the accessibility, reach, and transparency of the internet permit organizations and marketers to monitor the eWOM communication about their brands continuously [28]. Marketers Might create suitable correspondence devices should aggravate shoppers a greater amount proficient about particular brand alternately bank aspects Also attempt will change some of the negative acquaintanceships that customers need over the mark alternately the result through on the eWOM. It is crucial to say that positive WOM and e-WOM play a significant role in expanding consumers' purchase intentions, making an ideal picture of the particular organization and its brand, also diminishing promotional expenditures. Furthermore, it might be fascinating to analyze the impacts of eWOM communication on brand association for

more brands and in other product categories such as financial services due to WOM communication might have an especially important impact on consumers' perceptions of services or products that have high credence qualities [45]. Finally, it might a chance to be advantageous should test an extended model that more fully investigates brand association by including experiential, functional, and attitudinal dimensions of brand association [25].

With regards to cultural and social context used in this study, it is the opinion of the writers to conduct further studies on the impact of cultural and social environment on eWOM behavior. It is also important to determine either the traditional or electronic WOM is better to support consumer's decision which leads to purchase intention. On the other hand, further investigations on brand variables together with brand association can contribute to advancement of literature in this marketing field.

Finally, as a result of this article, it can be noted that feedbacks a consumer get through eWOM channels feeds their purchase intention. The results of the current study support the idea that eWOM impacts purchase intention. However, brand association is found to have a greater impact on purchase intention than eWOM.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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