



# Electronic Word of Mouth Factors in Social Media influencing Generation Z's Purchase Intention: Towards a Conceptual Framework

Abdulla Saleem Haroon<sup>1</sup>, Alex Ng Hou Hong<sup>1, a)</sup>, Wong Chee Hoo<sup>1</sup>, Lim Kim Yew<sup>1</sup>, Toong Hai Sam<sup>1</sup>, Yip Foong Yee<sup>1</sup>

1. Faculty of Business and Communications (FOBC), INTI International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN, Putra Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA

<sup>a)</sup> Correspondent Author Email: [houhong.ng@newinti.edu.my](mailto:houhong.ng@newinti.edu.my)

## Abstract

The advances of information technology and the emergence of online social media platforms have changed the way information is transmitted and have transcended the traditional limitations of word of mouth (WOM) by bringing a new perspective for electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) can reach a multitude of people at the same time and by that fact it shows its greater potential of becoming viral among most global and multicultural Generation Z. Every generation is different in terms of their personality traits as well as consumer behaviour. Generation Z is no different and it surpassed the millennials and Baby Boomers as the biggest generation, accounting for 32% of the world population. This conceptual paper aims to investigate and understand how electronic word of mouth on social media influences Generation Z behaviour and purchase intention. To accomplish the objectives of the study a conceptual framework is created by using the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The main variables of this study are eWOM information quality, eWOM information usefulness, eWOM information credibility, eWOM attitude towards information and Generation Z's purchase intention. This study will be conducted in Malaysia and the quantitative research methodology will be used, and the data will be collected and analysed from Malaysian Generation. The outcome of this study will contribute to understanding Generation and how Generation Z consumers process electronic word of mouth information on social and how does it affect their purchase intention.

**Keywords :** Electronic word of mouth (eWOM), social media, purchase intention, generation Z, information quality, information usefulness, information credibility, attitude toward information.

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## Introduction

Everyday consumers are exposed to a vast amount of advertisements through mass media channels. Hereby, this has given consumers more options to choose from as well as more information about products and services. As a result, now consumers have a hard time making a purchase decision. Therefore, this led consumers to exchange their opinion about products and services which is known as word of mouth (WOM) (Arndt, 1967). Previous studies have discovered that WOM conversation is more influential on consumers and more reliable

than the traditional form of media (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

Word of mouth has been around for a long time, but with the advent of the Internet era, it has been changed significantly. Before the Internet era has stepped, word of mouth took place either in conversations in the form of face to face or through cell phones (Tavukçuoğlu, 2018). Nowadays, consumers got a chance to exchange their opinions and experiences with millions of people through the internet. These online conversations regarding brands, products and services have been called electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Huete-Alcocer,



2017). Before the social media era started word of mouth conversations were spread through discussion forums, consumer review sites, blogs and online shopping websites (Haibin, 2018).

Kaplan & Heanlein defines social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that built on the "ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Gharbi & Al-Tamimi, 2020). In social media, users can create their content and share such as pictures and videos. This content can be either personal or about brand-related products and services (Dessart, et al., 2015). Recent studies have discovered that consumers tend to use social media to obtain information about brands and products and services (Erkan & Evans, 2018; Ismail, 2017). Social media platforms have brought a new prospect to electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Moreover, social media platforms enable a user to communicate with their existing network of followers and friends about their opinions and experiences. According to Digital 2020 Global Overview, there are 3.8 billion active social media users (We Are Social, 2020).

Consumers are using social media as the source to look for product information such as the brand, manufacturer background, and retailers when deciding to buy it (Chivandi et al., 2020). The purchase decisions are highly influenced by electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on social media sites. The persuasion effect of electronic word of mouth is seen as an opportunity for businesses to influence consumers by using various methods to influence (Khwaja & Zaman, 2020). The dependency and usage of social media, as well as reliance on eWOM information, has increased as a result of COVID-19. (Bashir et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2020). Researchers such as Le-Hoang (2020), agrees that only a few research that has been done on eWOM. Recent eWOM developments have shown that social media is the most popular eWOM channel among customers (Khwaja & Zaman, 2020).

As a result of an increasing number of users, many brands also have started to engage with consumers through social media using their official brand name as it has created an opportunity to interact with current and potential consumers (Venkatesan, 2017). As a result of this, consumers and brands are using social media platforms and this way of advertisement has created a new era in electronic

word of mouth. Marketers value social media as a vital eWOM transmitter with the ability to quickly disseminate information to the targeted customers (Bashir et al., 2019; Hussain et al., 2018). Regardless of what scholars and practitioners have researched and learned over the last 15–20 years on this subject, the future of social media marketing will not be simply a continuation of what has already been seen due to the fast-paced and ever-changing nature of social media and how users use it (Appel et al., 2020).

The term Generation Z applies to individuals born after the generation of the millennials. They are born between 1995 to 2010 (Mohr & Mohr, 2017). According to an article published by Bloomberg (L. J. Miller & Lu, 2018), Generation Z surpassed the millennials and Baby Boomers as the biggest generation, accounting for 32% of the world population or 2.47 billion of the 7.7 billion inhabitants on the planet (Spitznagel, 2020).

One of the most distinguishing features of Generation Z is that they were born digital natives. It implies that they have been immersed in the world of technology since their very first day (Dingli & Seychell, 2015). Furthermore, Generation Z is the most global and multicultural generation because they are born in an era where internationalism, gender equality, and climate change awareness are taken seriously. Therefore, caring for the greater good, social responsibility and social advocacy play a very important role in the behaviour of Generation Z (Uche, 2018). They are also more aware of global issues than all previous Generations. Hence, the way they live, socialize, process information and make decisions are completely different from any other generation (Miller, 2018).

Researchers are just starting to analyse the youngest generation of consumers. Understanding Generation Z is crucial as they are different from other generations in terms of personality traits as well as their consumer behaviour (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

#### *Problem Statement*

Consumers are exposed to a vast amount of information on social media as well as online. Hence, the created situation makes it difficult to anticipate that electronic word of mouth information being influential to consumers. Determinates of eWOM between social media and

consumer purchase intentions have not been yet explained even though some previous studies have discovered the impact of word of mouth on social media (Erkan & Evans, 2018). Furthermore, the linkage between customer adoption of eWOM in social media and purchase intentions remain unclear as there are limited empirical finding (Tien et al., 2019). Previous eWOM studies have been conducted on general consumers, but not on a specific age group or generation (Erkan & Evans, 2018; Ismail, 2017; Tien et al., 2019). Every generation is portrayed by certain characteristics, have their ways of making buying decisions and were influenced by different factors (Slootweg & Rowson, 2018). The inevitable growth of Generation Z represents a new challenge for marketers, they need to revise communication strategies to meet the constantly changing purchase behaviours of this cohort (Ismail et al., 2020).

Even though separate studies have been conducted to find out the impact of electronic word of mouth in social media, eWOM influence on an online platform such as review sites and shopping websites compared to social media has been studied previously in terms of eWOM between familiar people such as friends family and acquaintances on social media or eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms more influential on consumers' purchase intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2018). Furthermore, most studies focused on social media as a whole (Tien, et al., 2018). This means that the influence of individual or different social media platforms on eWOM was not tested. Besides, studies were conducted on the general consumer, not on context with a particular generation such as Generation Z.

### Objectives

RO1. To analyse the effect of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) information quality on Generation Z' online purchase intention in social media.

RO2. To examine the impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) information usefulness on Generation Z' online purchase intention in social media.

RO3. To identify the influence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) information credibility on

Generation Z' online purchase intention in social media.

RO4. To evaluate the level of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) attitude towards information on Generation Z' online purchase intention in social media.

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## Literature Review

### *Generation Z's Purchase Intention*

Purchase intention has been studied for decades by a number of scholars in a variety of contexts. Alalwan (2018) for starters, investigated the impact of social media advertising features on consumer purchasing intention. While Cheah et al., (2020) looked into the influence of price picture and the sugrophobia effect on luxury retail purchase intent.

Several factors, such as information quality influential on consumer purchase intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016; McClure & Seock, 2020; Zhao et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2020), information credibility (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Tien et al., 2019; Yusuf et al., 2018), information usefulness (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Tien et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2017). To be more precise, McClure & Seock (2020), examined the impact of brand familiarity and the information quality of social media content on a consumer's engagement with a brand on the brand's social media pages. Both brand recognition and information quality had major effects on a consumer's engagement with a brand on its social media page, which in turn had an impact on purchasing intention, according to the findings. Tien et al., (2019), looked at how customer-to-customer electronic word-of-mouth affects buying intention on social networking platforms. Since eWOM recipients are highly motivated to evaluate the message's credibility, this study discovered that they depend mostly on the intensity of the argument contained in the message to minimise ambiguity and prevent information asymmetry. The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions was investigated by Erkan & Evans (2016), conducted a study to examine the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. The findings show that quality, credibility, usefulness, adoption of information, needs of information and attitude towards information are the key factors of eWOM in social media that influence consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, in this research, these factors which were mentioned above have been employed



in the aim to understand the influence of eWOM in social media on Generation Z's purchase intentions in Malaysia.

Previous research on the impact of eWOM has reportedly concentrated on either the features of eWOM information or the behaviour of customers in response to eWOM information. However, according to a recent analysis of the literature on eWOM, the impact of eWOM is dependent on both information characteristics and consumer behaviour (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Knoll, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2018). The present study agrees with (Knoll, 2016), that eWOM information characteristics and customer behaviour toward eWOM information are needed to improve our understanding of eWOM engagement.

Moreover, this study tested "attitude" as another determinant of purchase intention. The relationship between the attitude and behavioural intention was previously proposed by several theories such as the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975), the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985), and the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989).

#### *eWOM Information Quality*

Argument quality is described by Eagly & Chaiken (1993), as the persuasiveness or strength of a compelling argument. Information quality is similar to argument quality, but it is analysed from a broader viewpoint. In the literature, information quality is characterised as "the degree to which customers consider that the information content posted by a business on its brand page is of high quality" (Zhang et al., 2016), or "the quality of a review's content in terms of information characteristics (relevance, understandability, sufficiency, and objectivity)" (Park et al., 2007). As a result, information quality on social media can be described as the impressions formed as a result of an evaluation of any content created by any individual (a customer or an organisation) on social media based on metrics such as accuracy, consistency, and sufficiency. Nonetheless, since the terms are used interchangeably, measurement objects for information accuracy are often applied within the framework of argument quality (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Hence, a study in various contexts

has identified information accuracy as a significant factor (McClure & Seock, 2020; Zhu et al., 2020). It has also been studied in the context of eWOM (Erkan & Evans, 2016, 2018; Yusuf et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2020); previously, researchers discovered that the quality of online feedback has a favourable effect on consumers purchase intention (Erkan & Evans, 2018; Park et al., 2007). Moreover, through eWOM, information quality has shown a favourable relationship with information usefulness, which has indirectly influenced purchase intention (Xue et al., 2018). Therefore, this study predicts eWOM information quality as one of the determinants of eWOM information on social media that determines Generation Z purchasing intentions; and it has an effect on the usefulness and credibility of eWOM information.

H1: Quality of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) information has a positive effect on Generation Z's online purchase intention on social media.

#### *eWOM Information Usefulness*

The belief of persons that using new information can increase their performance is referred to as information usefulness (Bailey & Pearson, 1983; Cheung et al., 2008). Since consumers associate with information when it is useful, information usability is regarded as the primary indicator of information adoption (Davis, 1989; Sussman & Siegal, 2003) and purchase intention (Lee & Koo, 2015); because customers tend to engage with the information when they find it useful. Luo et al., (2018), discovered a substantial link between information usefulness and eWOM. The study reveals scientifically that both consumer and expert eWOM information may play an essential role in deciding the usefulness of information consumers' views. Another research by Tien et al., (2019) discovered that information usefulness had a favourable impact on eWOM adoption in the context of skincare product purchases by Taiwanese customers. The research confirmed that eWOM adoption has a significant role in influencing eWOM reputation and usefulness for customers purchasing items on social networking (SNS) sites to boost the likelihood of adopting an eWOM message with information utility. Furthermore, research

conducted in the context of an online travel community by Hajli (2018), demonstrated that social media has an influence on information usefulness and, as a result, social word-of-mouth, which were produced based on an understanding of eWOM in the context of travel (Lunyai et al., 2021). As a result of the above, the following hypothesis between information usefulness and Generation Z purchase intention is proposed.

H2: Usefulness of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) information has a positive effect on Generation Z's online purchase intention on social media.

### *eWOM Information Credibility*

Ohanian (1990), defines source credibility as "a term widely used to mean a communicator's positive characteristics that influence the receiver's acceptance of a message." Given this concept, users are required to pay attention to posted content on social media whether they find the material to be of good quality or the sources to be trustworthy. This expectation is that people would find useful content that they believe to be of good quality or whose origins they perceive to be trustworthy (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Many who believe the content is useful to pay greater attention to it (Lee & Koo, 2015). More specifically, if a person trusts the information source because of its competence or honesty, this trust can lead him or her to view the information as useful (Cheung et al., 2008). In brief, as people trust the source, their perception of risk for the information decreases, and they may learn more from the information (Hussain et al., 2018). This would allow customers to place value on content. A study by Zha et al., (2018), which uses ELM as the referent theory, confirms that individuals who authored online posts (source credibility) in the context of social media and see it as credible will have an impact on eWOM in which they will use social media to obtain information about topics related to work or studies. Cheung et al., (2009), discovered a high link between believability and eWOM. According to this research, a high degree of trustworthiness will increase the user's willingness to communicate about online recommendations and will also encourage return

visits to additional consumer suggestions (Lunyai et al., 2021). Moreover, other studies showed in their findings that source credibility has an effect on eWOM (Hussain et al., 2018; J. K. Lee et al., 2017; Muda & Khan, 2020; Wu & Lin, 2017).

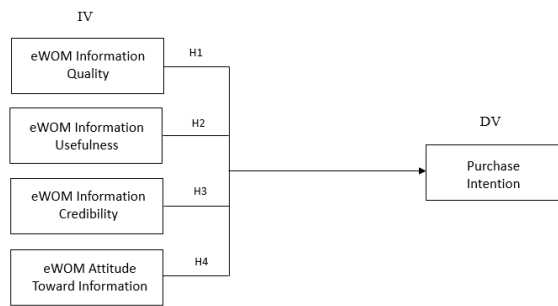
People are less inclined to embrace eWOM communications if the source is not viewed as reliable. As a result, Yusuf et al., (2018), shown that information credibility had a beneficial effect on eWOM. Kim et al., (2018), discovered a positive and substantial relationship between source credibility and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) information. As a result, this study predicts eWOM information credibility as one of the determinants of eWOM information on social media that affects Generation Z purchase intentions.

H3: Credibility of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) information has a positive effect on Generation Z's online purchase intention on social media.

### *eWOM Attitude Towards Information*

Another aspect evaluated in this research as a predictor of eWOM information on social media that effects Generation Z's buying intentions is attitude towards information. Consumers with positive attitudes about eWOM information on social media are more likely to have higher purchase intention. Several theories have emphasised and firmly supported the impact of customer attitudes on behavioural intentions. In addition to the TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975), TPB (Ajzen, 1985) and TAM (Bagozzi et al., 1992; Davis, 1989) reveal a connection between attitude and behavioural intention. According to TRA, one of the most important predictors of behavioural intention is attitude towards information. As a result, this research hypothesises, utilising the TRA, that social media users' attitude toward eWOM information may have a positive effect on Generation Z purchasing intentions.

H4: Attitude toward of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) information has a positive effect on Generation Z's online purchase intention on social media.



**Figure 1.** The Conceptual Framework

### Conclusion

This research provides a significant contribution to the body of knowledge by examining the Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth in Social Media on Generation Z's Purchase Intentions.

To develop a comprehensive conceptual framework based on a theoretical model of IAM (information adoption model) and TRA (theory of reasoned action). Both theories examine the determinants of eWOM information on social media influencing Generation Z's purchase intentions. The information adoption model explains the characteristics of the eWOM information (Ngarmwongnoi, et al., 2020). The theory of reasoned action expresses the behaviour of consumers towards eWOM information (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975).

Most eWOM research was conducted on general consumers. This research is focused on testing out this component of Generation Z.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the related literature as limited studies are focusing on eWOM on social media (Seo et al., 2020). Furthermore, to industry leaders and practitioners, this research provides marketers with a frame of reference to understand the influence of eWOM in social media on Generation Z's purchase intentions. This study provides useful information for marketers because the determinants presented by this study enable marketers to consider the nature of eWOM on social media, allowing marketers to create a stronger marketing strategy. Furthermore, this study focuses on the aspects of eWOM information that Generation Z consumers value; marketers who understand Generation Z consumers' preferences

can develop better eWOM marketing strategies for Generation Z.

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