



## Antecedents to Purchase Intention and the Moderating Role of Sense of Power on Information Quality and Trust in the Context of eWOM

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### ABSTRACT

Internet accessibility has changed consumers' attitudes and behaviors regarding searching and sharing information about goods and services. These interactions generate eWOM communications affecting trust, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions. Given the significance of eWOM, the study has developed a model that has examined seven relationships, including one moderating. The study recruited six enumerators who intercepted 415 respondents in the targeted malls. Of this total, 390 responded. The study used smart PLS for data analysis. EWOM affects trust, purchase intention, and brand loyalty. The study also found that brand loyalty and trust promote purchase intentions. Homophily also affects eWOM. In contrast to past literature, the study found an "insignificant linkage between information quality and trust." We also found the "moderating effect of sense of power on information quality and trust." The contribution of the study is as follows. Most studies have used trust and loyalty as antecedents to eWOM. We have used trust and loyalty as consequences of eWOM, on which a few studies are available. The literature documents inconsistent results on the "effect of eWOM on trust and loyalty" and (ii) the effect of "homophily on eWOM."

## Introduction

Increased internet accessibility worldwide has changed individuals' attitudes and behaviors, especially in collecting product-related information and purchasing decisions (Adibfa et al. 2022; Liu, Xiang, & Zhang, 2021). Social commerce relates to different commercial activities in social media to enhance consumer participation (Lin & Wang, 2022). Initially, consumers used social media to share knowledge

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and promote social communication. However, many researchers believe its focus has shifted from a product-oriented environment to a customer-centered background (Tajvidi, Wang, Hajli & Love, 2021). In the social environment, the consumer can access market-related information efficiently and share their product and service-related experience with others. All these enable consumers to make correct decisions. Whether consumers make rational or emotional decisions vary from one situation to another and from consumer to another consumer (Adibfa et al. 2022; Wang, & Hernando, 2019). Realizing the importance of social commerce, most firms globally are now spending substantial resources on it. Firms believe it will help them achieve competitive advantage and sustainable growth (Al-Adwan, 2019).

Factors such as low cost than conventional marketing and long and efficient reach to consumers have motivated the firms to use social commerce (Wang, Lin, & Spencer, 2019). Extant literature suggests that social commerce allows consumers to interact and engage with brands. Such interaction and engagement promote a sustainable relationship between brands and consumers (Son, & Diddi, 2022)). It also helps retain and attract existing customers (Lin & Wang, 2022). Using social media requires technological and marketing expertise. Many firms adopted social media tools without proper preparation, failing miserably and adversely affecting their image and reputation (Kili, Mulwo, & Kutto, 2022). Many social media users actively participate in social commerce by posting their experiences on the firm official web pages and consumers generated social media forums. Consumer empowerment means that firms must understand how consumers behave on social media and have in-depth knowledge of the factors that prompt them to generate positive or negative word-of-mouth communication (Liu, Xiang, & Zhang, 2021).

Based on a systematic literature review, Ismagilova, Slade, and Williams (2016) found that most of the studies on eWOM are available in China, Taiwan, South Korea, Germany, and the USA. Thus, the authors believe that more studies from other countries would increase the generalizability of the concept. We have responded to Ismagilova, Slade, and William's (2016) call by undertaking a study in Pakistan. The effect of homophily on eWOM is inconsistent and inconclusive. For example, a study in China found that homophily has an insignificant effect on eWOM (Teng, Khong, Goh & Chong, 2014). In contrast, Verma et al. (2023) Given these inconsistent results, there is a need for more studies on the impact of homophily on eWOM from other countries. Thus, we have examined the impact of homophily on eWOM, contributing to understanding the phenomenon.

Based on a systematic literature review, Khan, Hussin & Abdul- Hamid (2018) found that most past studies have used brand loyalty and trust as antecedents to eWOM. A few studies have used trust and loyalty as consequences for eWOM. The study also concluded that the results on the effect of eWOM on loyalty and trust are inconsistent and inconclusive (Some studies found a significant effect, and others found the opposite impact). Thus Khan, Hussin, & Abdul- Hamid (2018) have recommended more studies on the consequences of eWOM (i.e., trust and loyalty). Thus, we have responded to Khan, Hussin & Abdul- Hamid's (2018) call by using loyalty and trust as consequences in the conceptual framework.

## **Research Motivation and Objectives**

Mobile phones worldwide allow consumers to access social media and participate in social and personal interactions. Pakistan's telecommunication sectors in the last few years have grown significantly. According to an estimate of the total population of 200 million, 72% are mobile users in Pakistan, despite 24.3% living below the poverty level. These factors have increased social media



users significantly (Iqbal and Siddiqui 2019). This background and the gaps discussed in the earlier section have motivated us to undertake this study with the following research questions.

1. What is the effect of information quality and eWOM on trust?
2. What is the effect of eWOM, brand loyalty, and trust on purchase intention
3. What is the effect of eWOM on brand loyalty and the effect of homophily on eWOM? What is moderating role of the sense of quality on information quality and trust?

### Theoretical Grounding and Conceptual Framework

The study has extended the Information Adoption Model and a few components of TRA for the conceptual framework of this study, discussed in the following paragraphs.

EWOM elaborates on how individuals in communication send, receive, and interpret information (Le, Robinson, & Dobeles, 2023). The effect of communicated information in conventional communication and social media varies from one individual to another. It depends on various factors, including attitude, quality of information, homophily, credibility, and trust (Liu, Luo, & Yin, 2023). Many past studies have extended the information adoption process to explain how individuals internalize received information (Bi & Lu, 2023). Many past studies have used TRA/TAM modes to examine how individuals are affected by using ideas or information (Ajzen, 1985). Subsequently, Sussman and Siegal (2003) brought more advancement in knowledge by integrating them with dual process theories. The IAM model, thus, is an integrated version Elaborated likelihood model (ELM)( Petty et al., 1986) and TAM (Silva, 2015).

According to TRA, consumers' actual behavior is a significant predictor of behavioral intention, whereas behavioral intention is a consumer's intention to carry out a behavior. The theory also postulates that attitude and subjective norms directly link behavioral intention and actual behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Attitude is an individual's sustainable perception of a product or person, whereas cultural factors, family, and friends influence subjective norms. TRA had certain limitations, including time and money constraints. Given these limitations, the authors of TRA added a component of subjective norms and renamed it TPB. The developed conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1

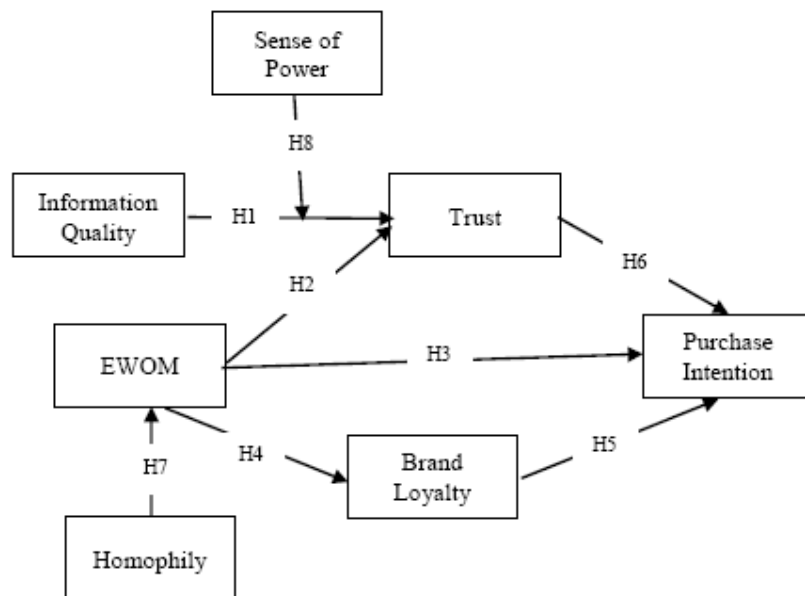


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



## Hypothesis Development

### Information Quality and Trust (H1)

Sussman and Siegal's (2003) information adaptation model assumes that consumers judge eWOM recommendations based on information quality and the source of information. Researchers believe that of the two, consumers give more importance to quality over source. Consumers' quality perception is subjective and varies from one to another (Solin & Curry, 2023). Khan, Soroya, and Mahmood (2022) assert that information quality significantly influences persuasion. Thus, the information quality of the web page is an essential precursor to consumers' trust (Simanjuntak et al., 2022). Extant literature documents a strong link between the information quality of the website and consumer trust (Fadhillah, Zebua & Prayoga, 2021). Since information quality is highly persuasive, it stimulates consumer interest, reduces the search process, and gives them confidence and trust in the quality of the products (Rahmawati & Untarini023). Many consumers believe that eWOM communication that provides strong evidence supporting the quality of a product is more reliable and creditable than other eWOM messages (Putri & Pujani2019). Thus, the information quality gives consumers more clarity on the product's features and enhances their trust level towards the products and services (Fadhillah, Zebua & Prayoga, 2021).

*H1: Information quality positively affects consumer trust*

### EWOM and Trust (H2)

Many individuals share their experiences on official and consumer-generated websites that generate eWOM communications. However, studies have found that consumers have more trust in the messages generated on consumers web pages than a seller's official webpage. Such a contrasting perception is that consumers consider messages on unofficial web pages or Facebook as third-party certification (Pyle, Smith & Chevitchouk, 2021). The impact of eWOM communication on consumers' trust depends on the credibility of the generated messages (Rao & Rao, 2019). Researchers have examined different facets of source credibility, including "expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness," and found these dimensions individually and collectively affect consumers' trust and purchase intention (Martínez, Herrero, García-de-los & Salmones, (2020). In eWOM, consumers share their experiences about goods and services but do not disclose their educational qualifications, background, and specialized knowledge and expertise. Despite this, consumers generally believe that the consumer-generated messages related to their experience are genuine and without any exaggeration. Thus, most consumers take consumer-generated messages at face value and trust eWOM communication highly (Fileri, Acikgoz & Du, 2023).

Borchers (2023) assert that the pattern of eWOM communication also affects consumers' trust. Most consumers trust messages and ratings that show a consistent pattern rather than erratic ratings and comments (Rao & Rao, 2019). Zhang, Wu, and Li (2019) believe that consumers generally have more trust in the communication posted on independent websites or social media and little in the messages shared on official websites. Similarly, other researchers also believe consumers are more confident in the messages posted on user-generated websites than company-generated ones (Le-Hoang2020).

*H2: eWOM positively affects trust.*



### **E-WOM and Purchase Intention (H3)**

E-word-of-mouth communication is more effective in changing consumers' attitudes and behaviors than paid commercials and advertisements (Evgeniy, Lee & Roh, 2019). Based on empirical evidence, Sulthana and Vasantha (2019) and other researchers have concluded that consumers' belief levels in consumer-generated communication are higher than in firm-generated communication (Lkhaasuren & Nam, 2018). Thousands of people read other individuals' comments about the quality of goods and services. A positive eWOM communication enhances purchase intention, while a negative one decreases consumers' intention to buy products or services (Kala & Chaubey, 2018)). Given its importance, extant literature suggests that many firms use it as a strategic tool for exchanging information with diverse audiences and stimulating positive buying behavior (Tien, Rivas & Liao, 2019). The usage of eWOM has also increased significantly because of its flexibility, low cost, and extensive reach to a diversified audience. Many consumers, especially young ones, share their experiences on social media, attracting new customers and motivating old ones to build sustainable relationships with the firms. These factors enhance firms' reputations and give them a competitive edge over others (Evgeniy, Lee & Roh, 2019).

*H3: eWOM positively affects purchase intention.*

### **Electronic Word of Mouth on Brand Loyalty (H4)**

Literature suggests that reviews (WOM and eWOM) significantly affect consumers' decision-making (Belhadi et al., 2023). Arif (2022) believes that eWOM is more critical in the hospitality and tourism industry apart from other sectors because their products are intangible, and consumers can only draw inferences about the quality of the products after experiencing them. In a study on hotels and tourism, Sang (2022) found that online reviews significantly increase hotel booking and promote loyalty. Belhadi et al. (2023) assert that loyal customers generate positive eWOM communication and often become brand advocators. However, the authors think "their study is the first to examine the effect of eWOM communication on brand loyalty."

*H4: eWOM positively affects brand loyalty*

### **Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention (H5)**

Brand loyalty is an important aspect of the "growth and sustainability" of business entities. It allows the firm to charge premium prices and make fewer efforts to retain existing and seek new customers (Huo et al., 2022). Goyal and Verma (2022) argue that there is a difference between frequent buying and brand loyalty. Frequent buyers are not price sensitive but are loyal to the brands, resulting in purchase and repurchase intentions. Satisfied, loyal customers also become the brand's spokesperson and recommend others to buy the brand (Goyal & Verma, 2022)). Many researchers believe that many loyal customers develop emotional feelings for a brand. Therefore, they have a higher purchase intention than others (Yaseen & Mazahir, 2019). Machi et al. (2022) in a study on the antecedents of purchase intention, concluded that brand loyalty has the most potent effect on consumer purchase intentions. Many studies, including Tanzaretha and Rodhiah (2022), document that "brand loyalty is a significant precursor of purchase intentions." Thus, successful firms focus on customer satisfaction and convert satisfied customers to loyal customers.

*H5: Brand loyalty positively affect purchase Intention*

### **Trust and Purchase Intention (H6)**

Trust is a prerequisite in all exchange transactions and critical for maintaining a sustainable customer relationship Chae, Kim, Lee, & Park, (2020). Extant studies have documented that trust stimulates



consumers' favorable attitudes toward a brand. Trust directly and indirectly affects purchasing intention (Sombultawee & Wattanatorn, 2022).). Bhattacharya, Sharma, and Gupta (2023). suggest that consumers, due to a brand's cognitive and affective values, start trusting it, which leads to purchase and repurchase intention. Social platforms allow consumers to interact and exchange their experiences without any inhibition. If the exchange messages are asymmetric, consumers' perception of perceived risk will increase, leading to low purchase intention (Rani, Toni, & Shivaprasad, 2022). On the contrary, if the messages are consistent, they would reduce perceived risk perception and increase repurchase intention (Bhattacharya, Sharma, & Gupta, 2023)). Sombultawee and Wattanatorn (2022) also found that both emotional-based and cognition-based variants of trust affect purchase intention individually and collectively. Chae, Kim, Lee, &

Park (2020) believes that consumers' subjective feelings for a product or service motivate them to search for consumers' generated information, which positively or negatively affects their purchase intention.

*H6: Trust positively affects purchase intention*

### **Homophily and eWOM (H7)**

Besides other factors, social homophily is important for eWOM (Huang & Lee, 2021). The source attractiveness model also postulates the similarity between social media users promoting eWOM communication (Onofrei, Filieri, and Kennedy2022). Consumers assess similarity based on demographics, personality traits, and perceived value (Kim, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2018). Most researchers agree that all these factors are important for eWOM, but many believe that personality traits and perceived values are more important than demographics (Santiago, & Serralha, 2022). While reviewing the message's contents, consumers compare the personality traits and values of the senders. If consumers find similarities between their personality traits and the senders' values, it will increase users' perceived similarity and eWOM communication (Huang & Lee, 2021). Studies based on the source-attractiveness model have concluded that social homophily significantly increases the credibility of online recommendations, and the viral messages they receive stimulate the recipients' emotional reactions (Van-Esch et al., 2018). Filieri, Acikgoz, and Du (2023) argue that the recipients' perception of the authenticity of the messages significantly depends on social comparison.

*H7: Homophily positively affects eWOM.*

### **The Moderating Effect of the Sense of Power (H8)**

All individuals have a built-in sense of power that affects their cognition, emotion, and behavior (Choi, Choi, & Mattila, 2019). Researchers have extensively used it in many disciplines to understand consumer psychology, consumers' information processing, and persuasion (Jiang et al., 2018). Extant literature suggests it has "a strong association with persuasiveness of and trust in consumer information" (Jiang et al., 2018). Similarly, Kim and Kim (2022)) also endorse this relationship. Consumers' persuasion of information varies from one individual to another. Research suggests that consumers who process information quickly are highly oriented toward a "sense of power." At the same time, consumers who are slow in processing information belong to the group of "shared sense of power." Given this theoretical background, we argue that a sense of power promotes "information quality and trust." Jiang et al.(2018) assert that psychological and sociological perspectives help understand from psychological and sociological perspectives. Extending this argument, Kim and Kim



(2022) believe that people in power, compared to others, have more resources and access to information, which enables them to evaluate and influence the association between information and trust.

*H8: The sense of power moderates information quality and trust.*

## **Methodology**

### **Population and Sample**

The target population for this study is the middle and upper-middle-class strata of Karachi who visits shopping Malls of Karachi. The study has targeted the four leading shopping malls in Karachi (i) Doment Mall, North Nazimabad, (ii) Forum Shopping Mall, Clifton (iii) Ocen Mall, Clifton. (iv) LucyOne Mall, Gulberg, Karachi. Using the mall intercept method, the recruited enumerators collected the data from the customers who visit these Shopping Malls. We used this method as the target population's sample frame was unavailable. The sample size was 386, calculated at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin error. The recruited enumerators approached 415 respondents, and 390 of them cooperated with the enumerators. The questionnaire used for the survey was in English as the target population is well-versed in it.

### **Respondent Profile**

Of the 390 respondents, 56% were males, and 44% were females. 45% of respondents were married, and the rest, 55%, were single. Their ages ranged from 18 to 55 years. 32% of respondents were between 18 and 30, 34% between 30 and 40, and 34% between 45 and 55. Regarding education, we found 51% had 12 years of education, 23% of respondents had bachelor's level education, and 26% had a Master's level education.

### **Scale and Measure**

The number of items in each construct ranged from seven to nine. We measured the respondents' opinions on five points Likert Scale. One indicates low agreement and five a high agreement."

### **Trust Scale**

Trust refers to consumers' confidence in the reliability of a brand or service. Consumers who trust a brand or service tend to have a favorable attitude toward it (Zha et al., 2020). The study adopted the trust scale (four items) from Ribbink et al. (2004). A high mean score reflects a higher trust level.

### **EWOM Scale**

The internet-based version of word-of-mouth communication is electronic (eWOM) (Kunja,., Kumar, & Rao, 2022). It has completely revolutionized individuals' social and economic behaviors. Online review is crucial for building brand image, product development, and customer retention. The study measured eWOM based on four items from Rani, Toni, and Shivaprasad (2022),

### **Purchase Intention Scale**

Purchase intention is consumers' future like-hood of purchasing goods or services. Purchase intention strongly predicts purchase behavior (Rani, Toni, & Shivaprasad, 2022). The study measured the purchase intention scale based on four items from Curvelo et al.(2019)



**Sense of Power Scale**

Sense of power is an individual's perception of their ability to persuade or influence others (Anderson & Berdahl 2002). The study measured respondents' options based on eight items from Li et al. (2002).

**Information Quality**

Information is a broad construct, which could be of quality or not. At the same time, information quality refers to "the relevance, timeliness, and comprehensiveness of information communicated." (Park and Kim, 2009). The study measured respondents' options based on four items from all Anderson and Berdahi (2002).

**Homophily**

Homophily refers to the similarity between senders, receivers, and social media (Chu & Kim, 2018). Homophilous consumers develop networking with individuals with similar needs, the same social life, and similar consumption behaviors (Saleem & Ellahi, 2017). The study measured respondents' options based on four items from McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond (2006)

**Brand Loyalty**

Customers always buy the same brand, which refers to brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is an important aspect of a business entity. The study measured respondents' options based on four items from (Aaker 1996).

**Results**

**Measurement Model**

We generated the measurement model (Refer to Figure 2) for results related to univariate normality, reliability, convergent validity, discriminant, and confirmatory factor analysis of the constructs used in the study. Other results follow:

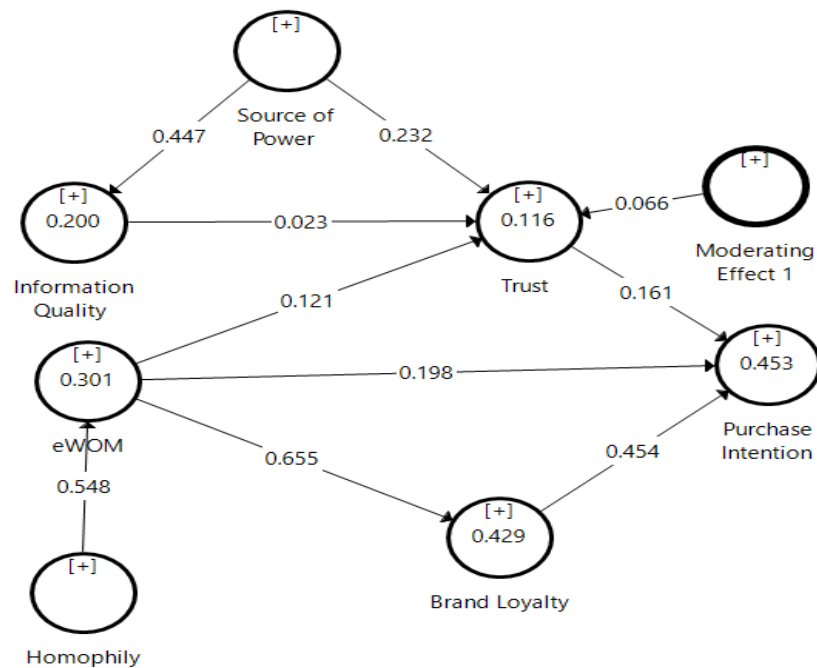


Figure 2 Measurement Model Here





## Descriptive Analysis

In the descriptive analysis, we examined Skewness and Kurtosis's shape to assist the univariate normality of the study's constructs. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Descriptive Analysis**

	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std.Dev.	Kurtosis	Skewness
Brand Loyalty	0.882	3.950	1.136	2.002	1.965
Homophily	0.875	3.870	0.987	1.735	1.098
Information Quality	0.848	4.001	0.999	1.787	-0.987
Purchase Intention	0.716	3.870	1.256	1.654	0.999
Source of Power	0.835	3.824	1.236	0.987	1.067
Trust	0.828	3.779	0.965	0.657	1.456
eWOM	0.880	3.868	1.736	1.876	1.321

The results show that all "Skewness and Kurtosis are between  $\pm 3.5$ , and Cronbach's Alpha values are at least 0.70." Based on the discussed results, we have inferred that "the constructs do not deviate from the requirements of univariate normality" (Henderson, 2006).

## Convergent Validity

Table 2 presents rhea, composite reliability, and AVE values. The Table also shows the factor loadings of each indicator variable.

**Table 2: Convergent validity**

	Loading	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
<b>Sense of Power</b>		<b>0.843</b>	<b>0.889</b>	<b>0.666</b>
SP1	0.674			
SP2	0.867			
SP3	0.793			
SP4	0.675			
SP5	0.811			
SP6	0.814			
SP7	0.789			
SP8	0.867			
<b>Brand Loyalty</b>		<b>.883</b>	<b>.927</b>	<b>0.810</b>
BL1	0.875			
BL2	0.883			
BL3	0.758			
BL4	0.685			
<b>Information Quality</b>		<b>0.848</b>	<b>0.908</b>	<b>0.768</b>
IQ1	0.919			
IQ2	0.909			
IQ3	0.909			
IQ4	0.670			
Purchase Intention		0.739	0.838	0.635
PI1	0.765			



PI2	0.734			
PI3	0.817			
PI4	0.845			
Trust		0.828	0.897	0.744
T1	0.843			
T2	0.765			
T3	0.689			
T4	0.786			
<b>eWOM</b>		0.883	0.926	9.807
eW1	0.876			
eW2	0.874			
eW3	0.798			
eW4	0.757			
Homophily		0.883	0.932	0.778
H1	0.893			
H2	0.918			
H3	0.876			
H4	0.838			

The composite reliability values in Table 2 are "higher than 0.838, and AVE values are at least 0.635," suggesting that all the constructs "fulfill convergent validity requirements" (Cheung & Wang, 2017).

### Discriminant Validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)

The study has presented the discriminant validity results in Table 3 using Fornell & Larcker's (1981) criteria.

**Table 3: Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larcker)**

	BL	H	IQ	P1	SOP	TR	eWOM
Brand Loyalty	0.847						
Homophily	0.557	0.853					
Information Quality	0.515	0.408	0.876				
Purchase Intention	0.634	0.623	0.448	0.796			
Source of Power	0.483	0.445	0.447	0.626	0.816		
Trust	0.343	0.343	0.211	0.362	0.312	0.863	
eWOM	0.68	0.548	0.597	0.534	0.443	0.241	0.898

The results show that all the Pearson correlation values pairs are lesser than Average Variance Extracted's square roots. Thus, we infer that the constructs used in the study are "unique and distinct" (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)

### Discriminate Validity (Heterotrait- monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT))

In addition to discriminant validity based on Fornell & Larcker's (1981), we also have assessed discriminant validity based on the HTMT ratio. The summary of the results in Table 4 shows that all HTMT values are below the threshold level of 0.86, which according to Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015), fulfills the discriminant validity requirement.



**Table 4: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)**

	BL	H	IQ	PI	SOP	Tr.
Homophily	0.614					
Information Quality	0.592	0.471				
Purchase Intention	0.785	0.774	0.561			
Source of Power	0.577	0.515	0.523	0.818		
Trust	0.396	0.403	0.251	0.447	0.365	
eWOM	0.741	0.622	0.692	0.651	0.509	0.282

### Structural Model

The study has assessed the path coefficients of the structural model for testing the proposed hypothesis. We have presented the structural model in Figure 3 and the Path coefficient in Table 5.

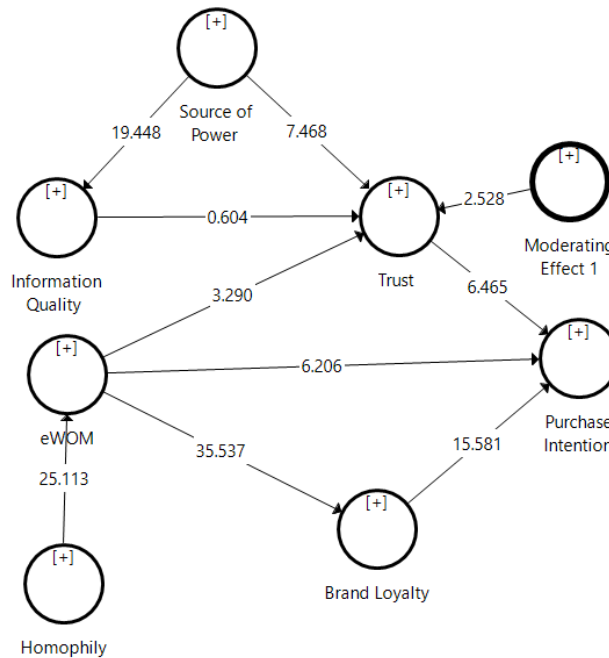


Figure 3: Structural Model

**Table 5: Hypotheses Results**

	$\beta$	T Stat.	P Values	Result
Information Quality -> Trust (H1)	0.023	0.656	0.512	Rejected
eWOM -> Trust (H2)	0.121	3.223	0.001	Accepted
eWOM -> Purchase Intention (H3)	0.198	6.152	0	Accepted
eWOM -> Brand Loyalty(H4)	0.655	36.195	0	Accepted
Brand Loyalty -> Purchase Intention (H5)	0.454	15.836	0	Accepted
Trust -> Purchase Intention(H6)	0.161	6.231	0	Accepted



Homophily -> eWOM (H7)	0.548	24.767	0	Accepted
Moderating Effect 1 -> Trust (H8)	0.066	2.596	0.01	Accepted

Information quality has an insignificant effect on trust, rejecting H1 ( $\beta = 0.023$ ,  $t = 0.756$ ). EWOM brand loyalty and trust stimulates purchase intention, supporting our H3 ( $\beta = 0.023$ ,  $t = 0.756$ ), H5 ( $\beta = 0.045$ ,  $t = 15.836$ ), and H6 ( $\beta = 0.161$ ,  $t = 6.231$ ). EWOM affects brand trust and brand loyalty, validating H2 ( $\beta = 0.121$ ,  $t = 3.223$ ), and H4 ( $\beta = 0.0665$ ,  $t = 36.195$ ). At the same time, we found homophily affects eWOM, and a sense of power can change the association between information quality and trust, supporting H7 ( $\beta = 0.023$ ,  $t = 0.756$ ), H8 ( $\beta = 0.023$ ,  $t = 0.756$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Discussion

Our research has extensively discussed the antecedent of purchase intentions and another relevant mechanism. We found information quality of the website does not affect consumers' trust. Contrarily, extant literature suggests that besides other factors, information quality on the web page promotes consumers' trust, purchase intention, and credibility of the WOM (Solin, & Curry, 2023). Perhaps the consumers in Pakistan did not trust the information quality of the webpage because most of the web pages in Pakistan lack alignment with the culture of Pakistan. Literature also documents that consumers still have more faith in conventional media communication (Morra et al., 2018).

The current study extends past studies that found eWOM promotes trust (Rao & Rao, 2019). Social media has changed most people's attitudes and behavior towards life in general and in the Context of buying behavior. Consumers in need of goods and behavior based on the consumer's generated messages on social media make their purchase decision (Pyle, Smith & Chevtchouk, 2021). Research suggests that the influence of consumer-generated communication is more effective than firm-generated messages. Consumers' trust in generated messages depends on whether erratic or consistent. The erratic and inconsistent pattern is less effective in stimulating trust than consistent and non-erratic messages (Martínez, Herrero, García-de-los & Salmons, 2020). Although consumers are now aware of the qualification and expertise of message generators, studies suggest that most consumers generally do not have apprehension about messages generated by others (Martínez, Herrero, García-de-los, and Salmons, 2020).

The study found a positive association between eWOM and purchase intention, consistent with earlier studies (Evgeniy, Lee & Roh, 2019). Consumers have more confidence in the messages generated by consumers rather than on official web pages or paid advertisements (Sulthana & Vasantha (2019). Due to consumers' empowerment, they read the comments and reviews of the goods and services they want. If generated messages are positive, it will enhance their motivation to purchase the products or services. On the other hand, negative word-of-mouth communication oppositely affects consumers' purchase intention. Given its importance, extant literature suggests that many firms use it as a strategic tool for exchanging information with diverse audiences and stimulating positive buying behavior (Tien, Rivas & Liao, 2019). Recently, the famous Footballer Cristiano Ronaldo, in a press conference with his gesture put aside Coca Cola bottle and pick up water, inflicting a loss of \$ 4 million to the firm, suggesting how persuasive visual messages could be if they relate to the celebrity who everyone lover world over (Business Standard, 2021).



Our study found a significant association between eWOM and brand loyalty. Most of the past studies have examined the effect of brand loyalty on eWOM, and a few have explored the effect of eWOM on brand loyalty (Belhadi et al. 2023,). Although eWOM communication is vital in the service and manufacturing industries, many researchers believe it is essential in the hotel and tourism sectors. The goods in the services industry are intangible, and users can only infer their quality after consuming them. Therefore, their reliance on eWOM communication is important (Arif, 2022).

The study validated the association between brand loyalties and purchase intention, aligning with many past studies' findings (Yaseen & Mazahir, 2019). Firms focusing on growth and sustainable customer relationships must focus on enhancing brand loyalty. Brand loyalty develops over time by consistently satisfying customers' real and emotional needs. Loyal customers generate positive word-of-mouth communications that help firms retain and attract new customers. Loyal customers are neither price-sensitive nor attentive to competitors' messages (Goyal, Verma, 2022). Anzareth and Rodhiah (2022) believe that firms' sustainability depends on converting satisfied customers to loyal customers.

Our study has validated earlier findings that trust stimulates purchase intention (Chae, Kim, Lee, & Park, 2020). Gao et al. (2017) suggest that "consumers' emotional and cognitive behaviors" significantly stimulate purchase intention (Gao et al., 2017). The relationship between the message generators and purchasers has a strong association. This relationship depends on similar values and traits with messages senders or consumers experience with the source message (Sombultawee & Wattanatorn, 2022). Trusted message consumers risk perception leading towards the purchase and repurchase intentions. Consumers' subjective feelings motivate consumers to collect information, and since they are risk avoiders, they tend to collect information and messages from trusted sources ((Rani, Toni, & Shivaprasad, 2022).

The study found that homophily is a significant predictor of eWOM communication. The findings support earlier studies that found an association between homophily and eWOM communication. However, it does not support other studies that found an insignificant association between homophily and eWOM communication. Consumers generally trust messages generated by consumers with similar demographic and personality traits (Kim, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2018). Van-Esch et al. (2018) assert that the source attractiveness model also assumes that social homophily stimulates recipients' emotional reactions and enhances consumers' purchase intentions.

We found that information quality does not have a direct association with trust. However, the study found that "consumers' sense of power moderates the quality of information and trust." This finding validates the results of Zhao et al. (2020). Jiang et al. (2018) assert that a sense of power is significantly associated with information quality and consumer trust. Consumers' persuasion of information varies from one individual to another. Consumers with a high sense of power may process information quickly, while consumers with a common sense of power may process information slowly or not at all (Kim & Kim, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

EWOM communication generated by consumers can positively or negatively affect consumers' purchase intentions. The important variables directly and indirectly related to eWOM and purchase intention are information quality trust, brand loyalty, and homophily. Given their importance, we have incorporated all these variables into the study's conceptual framework. The study has focused on the middle and upper-middle-income strata of Karachi. The study collected a sample of 415 from the leading malls of Karachi and tested articulated hypotheses using Smart Pls Version 3.3.

The study found that information quality indignantly affects trust. At the same time, eWOM, brand loyalty, and trust positively affect purchase intention. EWOM positively affects brand loyalty, and



homophily positively affects eWOM. Sense of power significantly moderates information quality and trust. Also, homophily moderates eWOM and brand loyalty.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The extant literature suggests more studies on trust as an antecedent to eWOM are available, and a few on trust as a consequence of eWOM. Ismagilova, Slade, and William (2016) found inconsistent results on the effect of eWOM on trust. Our study found that eWOM significantly affects trust. Thus, examining these inconclusive results may bring more insight into the phenomenon. Past literature also suggests inconsistent results on the effect of eWOM on brand loyalty (Ismagilova, Slade, and William, 2016). The study found a significant effect of eWOM on brand loyalty, thus contributing to the theory. The effect of homophily on eWOM is inconsistent and inconclusive. For example, a study in China found that homophily has an insignificant effect on eWOM (Teng, Khong, Goh & Chong, 2014). In contrast, a study in Germany found eWOM significantly affects eWOM (Lis, 2013). Given these inconsistent results, we have contributed by finding that eWOM positively affects homophily.

### **Managerial implications**

Our results have several implications for managers and practitioners. The information quality of a web page significantly affects trust, stimulating positive purchase intentions. Our study found that the information quality of the web page does not affect trust, which is contrary to past studies. Thus, e-commerce on their web page should align with the culture as it significantly affects consumer trust and purchase intention. The results show that "consumers' sense of power moderates information quality and trust." The literature suggests that high-power-orientated consumers are highly inclined toward themselves, while low-power consumers are more inclined toward the community. The firms may focus on these aspects while developing their marketing strategies. The results suggest that similarity in the users and social media have a significant association. However, different users with different personalities and traits access social media. We believe that while developing the web pages, the firms must focus on the target audience. It will attract target consumers and promotes trust, loyalty, and purchase intention.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The study has made a significant contribution to theory and practices. However, it has several limitations which future studies can examine. We have targeted the upper-middle class of one city, Karachi. Future studies can examine other income strata and other cities. We have not focused on one social media but advise others to focus on one social forum. The effect from one social forum to another may vary. Therefore, comparative studies of the different social forms may give further insight. We advise others to compare the effects of these variables on WOM and eWOM communication. The cultural aspect significantly affects attitudes and behaviors, which others can use in their studies.

(Lin & Wang, 2022)



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