



Assessing The Influence Of Electronic Word-Of-Mouth On Course Enrollment In Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The widespread adoption of social media and technological advancements has led to significant changes in consumer behavior and production methods. Social media platforms have become influential in shaping consumers' purchasing decisions, particularly in promoting the consumption of environmentally friendly products. Studies have shown that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) significantly impacts consumers' intentions to purchase. To explore the factors influencing consumers' decisions to enroll in educational institutes, a conceptual model was developed. This model considers E-WOM, Information Quality, and Source Credibility as key variables. Statistical validation using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and data collected from 450 respondents confirmed the significance of all hypotheses. Particularly, the influence of E-WOM, Information Quality, and Source Credibility on purchase intention was found to be significant. These findings offer valuable insights for marketers, emphasizing the importance of E-WOM in shaping consumers' enrollment decisions in educational institutes. Understanding these mechanisms can help marketers develop more effective strategies to attract prospective students and improve enrollment rates

Keywords: E-wom, Information Quality, Source credibility, Educational Institutes, Purchase intention

Introduction

In today's digital age, the landscape of consumer decision-making has undergone a profound transformation, significantly influenced by the advent of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). With the proliferation of online platforms and social media networks, individuals now have unprecedented access to information and opinions about products and services. This phenomenon holds particular relevance in the realm of educational institutions, where prospective students rely heavily on peer recommendations and online reviews to guide their enrollment decisions (Moran, & Muzellec, 2014). This study aims to delve into the intricate dynamics between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and the enrollment patterns of educational courses. Specifically, we seek to understand how eWOM, disseminated through various online channels, impacts the decision-making process of individuals considering enrollment in courses offered by educational institutions. By examining the interplay between eWOM, source credibility, information quality, and purchase intention, we aim to shed light on the underlying mechanisms driving consumer behavior in the educational domain. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform marketing strategies and enrollment management practices within educational institutions. As competition among institutions intensifies and the demand for online education grows, understanding the factors influencing course enrollment becomes paramount. By elucidating the role of eWOM in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors, educational institutions can devise more targeted and effective marketing campaigns, thereby enhancing their competitive edge in the marketplace.

The proliferation of online platforms and social media networks has democratized the dissemination of information, enabling individuals to share their opinions and experiences with a global audience. This democratization of information has profound implications for consumer decision-making, as individuals increasingly turn to online reviews and recommendations to inform their choices. In the context of educational institutions, where the stakes are high and the decision-making process is complex, eWOM plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and influencing enrollment decisions. One of the key factors driving the impact of eWOM on course enrollment is source credibility. Research has shown that individuals are more likely to trust

information shared by credible sources, such as friends, family members, or recognized experts. In the context of educational institutions, positive eWOM from credible sources can significantly enhance the perceived value of a course, leading to increased enrollment rates. Conversely, negative eWOM from sources perceived as less credible can deter prospective students from enrolling, highlighting the importance of managing online reputation effectively (Halbusi & Tehseen, 2018). Furthermore, the quality of information conveyed through eWOM plays a crucial role in influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors. Individuals are more likely to act on information that is perceived as relevant, accurate, and trustworthy. In the context of educational courses, positive eWOM that provides valuable insights into the curriculum, teaching methods, and student experiences can serve as a powerful catalyst for enrollment. Conversely, misleading or inaccurate information can erode trust and undermine the credibility of an educational institution, ultimately impacting enrollment numbers. Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate the relationship between eWOM, source credibility, information quality, and purchase intention in the context of educational course enrollment. By analyzing data gathered from a self-administered questionnaire, featuring items derived from existing literature and anchored in established scales, we seek to gain deeper insights into the mechanisms driving consumer behavior in this domain (Ajzen, 1991). Ultimately, our findings have the potential to inform marketing strategies and enrollment management practices, enabling educational institutions to better meet the needs and preferences of prospective students in an increasingly competitive landscape.

In addition to exploring the intricacies of eWOM, source credibility, and information quality, future research could also consider the impact of other factors such as demographic variables, institutional reputation, and course offerings on enrollment decisions. By taking a comprehensive approach and considering a wide range of variables, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing course enrollment and develop more effective strategies for attracting and retaining students. Furthermore, as technology continues to evolve and new communication channels emerge, it will be important for educational institutions to adapt their marketing and enrollment strategies accordingly. By staying attuned to changing trends and leveraging the power of digital communication, institutions can better engage with prospective students and create a more personalized and immersive enrollment experience.

Literature Review

The present study draws upon a robust theoretical foundation to investigate the intricate relationship between Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and the purchase intentions in context of educational courses. This exploration is guided by contemporary theories that illuminate the dynamics of consumer behavior, communication, and environmental consciousness. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) significantly influences consumers' purchase intentions, particularly in the context of green products, which are characterized by environmental and sustainability attributes. eWOM, conveyed through online platforms like social media and review sites, plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. One key aspect is the informational value of eWOM. The interlink between Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and educational institutions is profound and multifaceted, shaping various facets of institutional operations, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement. In the digital age, eWOM serves as a powerful catalyst in influencing the perceptions and decisions of prospective students, parents, alumni, faculty, and other stakeholders within the educational ecosystem. One of the primary domains where eWOM exerts its influence is in shaping institutional brand reputation and image. Positive eWOM, such as glowing reviews from satisfied students, alumni testimonials, and favorable mentions on social media platforms, can significantly enhance the perceived credibility and desirability of an educational institution. This positive reinforcement of the institution's reputation can contribute to increased interest and enrollment from prospective students who place trust in the experiences and recommendations shared by their peers and other trusted sources.

Conversely, negative eWOM, comprising complaints, criticism, or unfavorable reviews, poses a significant risk to an institution's reputation and can deter prospective students from considering enrollment. In an era where online information is readily accessible and influential, a single negative review or viral social media post can have far-reaching consequences, impacting not only enrollment rates but also the overall perception of the institution. Therefore, educational institutions must actively monitor and manage their online reputation, promptly addressing concerns and amplifying positive feedback to mitigate the potential impact of negative eWOM.

Moreover, the influence of eWOM extends beyond mere perception management to directly impacting recruitment and enrollment efforts. Prospective students increasingly rely on eWOM, including online reviews, ratings, and recommendations, as key sources of information during their decision-making process. By accessing insights and opinions shared by current students, alumni, and faculty members, prospective students gain valuable insights into the institution's academic programs, campus culture, student life, and overall educational experience. Positive eWOM can serve as a persuasive tool, influencing prospective students to choose one institution over another based on the perceived quality, satisfaction, and alignment with their academic and personal goals.

Within the confines of educational institutions, eWOM also plays a pivotal role in shaping student engagement and experience. Positive eWOM shared by students, alumni, and faculty members fosters a sense of

community, belonging, and pride within the institution. Online platforms and social media channels provide avenues for students to share their experiences, achievements, and perspectives, facilitating peer-to-peer interactions and collaboration. By harnessing the power of eWOM to highlight student success stories, academic achievements, and extracurricular activities, institutions can cultivate a positive institutional culture and strengthen connections among members of the academic community. Furthermore, effective management of eWOM is integral to the success of marketing and communication strategies employed by educational institutions. Institutions leverage positive eWOM to reinforce key messaging, enhance brand visibility, and attract prospective students through targeted marketing campaigns, social media initiatives, and digital storytelling. By amplifying positive feedback and testimonials from satisfied students and alumni, institutions can differentiate themselves in a competitive market and appeal to the preferences and aspirations of prospective students.

Additionally, eWOM from alumni serves as a critical driver of alumni engagement and fundraising efforts. Positive experiences shared by alumni can inspire pride, loyalty, and a sense of affiliation with their alma mater, encouraging continued involvement and support. Alumni eWOM also influences philanthropic behavior, including donations, sponsorships, and volunteerism, which contribute to the financial sustainability and growth of educational institutions. Through strategic engagement and leveraging alumni networks, institutions can harness the collective power of eWOM to strengthen relationships with alumni, foster a culture of giving back, and secure resources for institutional advancement.

In conclusion, the interlink between eWOM and educational institutions underscores the transformative impact of digital communication on institutional reputation, recruitment, student engagement, and alumni relations. By recognizing the influence of eWOM and implementing proactive strategies for reputation management, engagement, and communication, institutions can leverage the power of digital word-of-mouth to achieve their strategic goals, enhance their competitiveness, and create meaningful experiences for students and stakeholders alike. Commonly recognized as a precursor in the central route, information quality is acknowledged for its role in conveying the persuasive strength of a message, as described by Cheung and Thadani (2012). In the context of the current study, information quality is elucidated as the influential potency inherent in Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). Specifically, previous research has consistently asserted that high-quality information has a positive impact on purchase intentions (Lee and Shin, 2014; Park et al., 2007). Sussman and Siegal (2003) and Cheung and Lee (2012) have anticipated, especially within online platforms, that the perceived usefulness or information usefulness is an individual perception shaped by the assimilation of novel ideas and opinions. This perception, contributing to the articulation of product or service performance, serves as a predictor for user adoption and system usage, displaying robust associations. There is a prevailing belief that comments, online reviews, and opinions shared by opinion leaders or experienced individuals within online platforms wield significant influence when deemed useful. This literature synthesis has led us to discern that the utilization of E-WOM significantly impacts purchase intentions, thereby forming the basis for our hypothesis.

Research methodology

To achieve the research aims, we utilized a self-administered survey containing items drawn from existing literature. The survey underwent preliminary testing and subsequent adjustments based on expert feedback to optimize its efficacy. Divided into five distinct sections, the survey encompassed Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), Source Credibility, Information Quality, Purchase Intention, and Demographics. Respondents addressed five items in the E-WOM section, while the Source Credibility and Information Quality sections consisted of four items each. Measurement was conducted using a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This methodological approach, grounded in established metrics and a well-structured questionnaire, aimed to effectively gather relevant data for analyzing the correlations between E-WOM, Source Credibility, Information Quality, and Purchase Intention within the context of educational institutes.

Table 1 Demographic Variables

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	180	48.65
	Female	190	51.35
Age	20-30	198	53.51
	30-40	99	26.76
	40-50	27	7.3
	50-60	36	9.73
Education	High school	81	21.89
	Graduate	135	36.49
	Post graduate	247	66.76
	Others	27	7.3
Monthly Income	Under 10000	4	1.08
	10000-20000	59	15.95

	20000-30000	144	38.92
	30000-40000	234	63.24
	Above 40000	9	2.43

Table 2: Measures

Construct	Items	Cronbach Alpha
Electronic Word of Mouth	Ewom1: I regularly check online reviews to see what others think about different educational institutes. Ewom2: I often read reviews from current or former students to ensure I choose the right educational institute. Ewom3: I consult online reviews from students or alumni to help me decide on the best educational institute. Ewom4: Before making a decision, I frequently gather information from online reviews to learn about the reputation of educational institutes. Ewom5: If I don't read online reviews before choosing an educational institute, I feel uncertain about my decision.	0.821
Information Quality	IQ1: I find it easy to grasp information about educational institutes on social media. IQ2: I find information about educational institutes on social media to be straightforward. IQ3: I believe it's easy for me to understand information about educational institutes on social media. IQ4: Overall, I think the information about educational institutes on social media is of good quality.	0.876
Information Credibility	IC1: I believe they make a good case for their educational programs. IC2: I think they are powerful in their presentations and communications. IC3: I trust that they are reliable sources of information about educational opportunities. IC4: I believe they are correct and honest in their portrayal of their educational offerings.	0.761
Purchase Intention	PI1: If I read positive reviews about an educational institute on social media, I'll probably consider enrolling there. PI2: The next time I'm looking for an educational institute, I'll consider one that has good reviews on social media. PI3: I'll recommend educational institutes with positive feedback on social media to my peers.	0.846

To collect the data, a simple random sampling method was utilized. The questionnaire was distributed through social media platforms to individuals who have either indicated a preference for enrolling in educational institutes or have a history of exploring such opportunities. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed across different social media channels. As a result, 370 valid responses were utilized for the study.

Data analysis and results

In our varied sample comprising 370 respondents, the distribution of gender indicates a nearly equal representation, with males accounting for 48% and females for 51%. The age distribution highlights a predominant presence in the 20-30 age bracket, closely followed by the 30-40 age group, underscoring the study's attractiveness to a younger demographic. Regarding educational backgrounds, a considerable proportion of respondents hold either graduate or post-graduate qualifications, indicating a well-educated participant pool. Additionally, a detailed examination of monthly income reveals that a significant segment of the sample, comprising 63%, falls within the 30000-40000 income range. These findings are summarized in Table 1, offering a comprehensive depiction of the diverse and dynamic characteristics observed among our study participants.

Measurement model

The proposed model underwent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure high reliability and validity for structural equation modeling (SEM). Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Reliability were scrutinized and are presented in Table 2. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha through SPSS, revealing favorable results for all items. E-WOM, Credibility, Quality, and Purchase Intention demonstrated robust reliability, each ranging from 0.75 to 0.810, surpassing the 0.6 threshold. A total of 16 items were strategically utilized to gauge the four constructs within the model. To assess the similarity in

variance among items within constructs, standardized factor loadings were scrutinized. Factor loadings, ranging from 0.731 to 0.938, affirmed the significant relationship between observed variables and their respective constructs, thereby confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was ascertained by comparing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each variable with the Squared Correlation between variables. This rigorous examination ensured that each construct was distinct from others, reinforcing the discriminant validity of the proposed model. In summary, the measurement model not only demonstrated high reliability but also substantiated convergent and discriminant validity, laying a robust foundation for the subsequent structural equation modeling. The details of these assessments are elucidated in Table 2.

Table 3: Average Variance Extracted

	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	EWOM	IQ	IC	PI
EWOM	0.921	0.721	0.324	0.191	0.849			
IQ	0.862	0.611	0.384	0.184	0.533	0.782		
IC	0.817	0.527	0.279	0.124	0.312	0.409	0.726	
PI	0.929	0.739	0.286	0.104	0.240	0.402	0.435	0.861

Table 4: Summary of goodness of fit indices

Model Fit Indices	DF	CFI	GFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA
Measurement Model	1.91	0.92	0.92	0.94	0.943	0.035
Structural Model	1.92	0.94	0.91	0.95	0.964	0.043

Table 5: Summary of testing of hypotheses

Paths	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Relationship
PI <- EWOM	0.13	0.237	0.03	Confirmed
PI <- IQ	0.22	1.75	0.02	Confirmed
PI <- IC	0.87	3.43	0.00	Confirmed

The goodness-of-fit indices, including CFI, GFI, TLI, NFI, and RMSEA, were meticulously examined to assess the adequacy of the measurement model. Satisfactory results are typically indicated by values less than 3, with CFI, NFI, GFI, and TLI exceeding 0.9, and RMSEA not surpassing 0.08. As demonstrated in Table 4, the analysis reveals favorable values for the degrees of freedom (df), CFI, GFI, NFI, TLI, and RMSEA, measuring 1.91, 0.92, 0.92, 0.94, 0.943, and 0.035, respectively. Each of these values falls within the accepted range, affirming the validity of the structural model. The subsequent step involved testing the research hypotheses within the model, as summarized in Table 5. The beta values elucidate the degree of influence exerted by independent variables on dependent variables. All hypotheses were tested positively, with Electronic Word of Mouth, Information Quality, Information Credibility, and Purchase Intention exhibiting different p-values, establishing significant relationships. In essence, the results validate the measurement model's robustness and provide a solid foundation for further hypothesis testing within the research model. The nuanced findings offer insights into the intricate interplay of Electronic Word of Mouth, Information Quality, Information Credibility, and Purchase Intention in the context of the study.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this study, we have thoroughly explored the intricate dynamics surrounding Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) and its profound impact on the selection process of educational institutes. Our primary objective was to dissect the myriad factors influencing individuals' decisions when choosing educational institutions, thereby contributing to a better understanding of how E-WoM shapes enrollment behaviors within the academic domain. Drawing from a substantial body of research that has investigated the influence of E-WoM across various sectors, our findings align with existing literature, affirming a significant positive relationship between E-WoM and the selection of educational institutes (p-value < 0.05). Furthermore, our study has shed invaluable light on the critical role played by Information Quality in guiding individuals' choices regarding educational institutions. By meticulously examining the correlation between Information Quality and the selection of educational institutes (p-value < 0.05), we have underscored the importance of accurate, reliable, and easily accessible information in the decision-making process. Similarly, Information Credibility has emerged as a pivotal factor, exerting a substantial influence on prospective students' intentions to enroll in specific educational programs within various academic institutions. The comprehensive model developed in this study underscores the undeniable influence of E-WoM in driving the selection process of educational institutes. As prospective students increasingly turn to online platforms to gather information and insights about potential educational opportunities, E-WoM serves as a powerful mechanism for sharing experiences, opinions, and recommendations. This virtual word-of-mouth communication transcends traditional advertising channels, providing prospective students with authentic and relatable perspectives that inform

their decision-making process. In light of these compelling findings, it is incumbent upon educational administrators, policymakers, and marketers to strategize effectively, leveraging the potency of E-WoM in creating awareness and facilitating informed decision-making among prospective students. By harnessing the power of positive E-WoM and emphasizing the dissemination of accurate and credible information, educational institutions can enhance their visibility, attract prospective students, and foster a more informed and engaged student body. This strategic emphasis on leveraging E-WoM in the selection process of educational institutes aligns seamlessly with the overarching goal of providing prospective students with access to high-quality education and empowering them to make well-informed choices that align with their academic and career aspirations

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study presents valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the interpretation and applicability of the findings. The examination of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) in this study was focused on a specific set of factors. Future researchers are encouraged to explore additional elements contributing to E-WOM, such as homophily, information quantity, and the utilization of social networking sites. Incorporating these factors into future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of their influence on the selection process of educational institutes. Additionally, there is a potential for future research to delve into the realm of negative Electronic Word of Mouth. While this study primarily examined the positive impact of E-WOM on the selection process of educational institutes, a comprehensive exploration of negative E-WOM could offer a more balanced perspective. Understanding how negative reviews or opinions influence individuals' decisions when choosing educational institutes could yield valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers. Moreover, to enhance the generalizability of findings, future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies on a larger scale by drawing from substantial sample sizes. Expanding the scope of research to include a larger and more diverse sample population would contribute to the robustness of research outcomes and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics between E-WOM and the selection process of educational institutes. This would allow for a more nuanced analysis of the factors influencing individuals' decisions when choosing educational institutes and facilitate the development of targeted strategies to optimize the impact of E-WOM in the educational domain.

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