

The effect of electronic word of mouth: how credibility shapes consumer purchase intention

Neringa Vilkaite-Vaitone¹ 

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) credibility on purchase intention, with eWOM adoption and product attitude acting as mediators.

Theoretical framework – The research links eWOM credibility to consumer purchase intention, using the cognition-affection-behaviour (CAB) model. In this model, eWOM credibility represents the cognitive component, while eWOM adoption and product attitude represent the affective component, with purchase intention reflecting the behavioural component.

Design/methodology/approach – The study was based on 318 valid responses from Facebook users who completed a self-administered questionnaire. A structural equation model (SEM) was constructed using SmartPLS 4.0.

Findings – The findings indicate that eWOM credibility is influenced by the homophily of the source, strength of the argument and trustworthiness of the source, which ultimately affect purchase intention. Additionally, the study revealed that eWOM adoption mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention.

Practical & social implications of research – The research adds depth to our understanding of the factors influencing consumer behaviour. It advances the literature on digital marketing and consumer behaviour by highlighting adoption as a key mechanism through which eWOM credibility translates into behavioural outcomes. The insights presented in the study offer actionable recommendations for improving eWOM. On a social level, by raising awareness of the factors that contribute to eWOM credibility, the study encourages broader conversations around transparency, digital ethics, and consumer empowerment in the online marketplace.

Originality/value – To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study to examine the interaction between eWOM credibility and its determinants (source homophily, argument strength, and source trustworthiness), as well as eWOM adoption and product attitude, within the CAB model framework.

Keywords: Word of mouth (WOM), social media, credibility, source trustworthiness, purchase intention.

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1. Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Faculty of Business Management, Vilnius, Lithuania

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1 Introduction

Thanks to the interactive nature of the internet, consumers now have unparalleled access to information about products and services. They can also share ideas with other consumers, friends and even companies (Huhn Nunes et al., 2018; Teng et al., 2014). These interactions occur via instant messaging, blogs, online communities, forums and, increasingly, social networking sites. The latter, in particular, have become essential platforms for sharing personal thoughts, experiences and opinions about brands (Kapoor et al., 2019; Kursan Milaković et al., 2020).

Many online shoppers now rely on the reviews and advice of other consumers on social media before making a purchase (Izogo et al., 2023). This type of communication, known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), has become highly influential thanks to the functionalities of social networking sites. As a result, online reviews, blogs and social platforms have emerged as powerful forces in shaping consumer decision-making.

However, compared to face-to-face WOM, online recommendations often come from unfamiliar or anonymous sources, making it difficult for consumers to judge their trustworthiness. Furthermore, the prevalence of fake reviews has further fuelled scepticism about online reviews (Verma et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). Consequently, the credibility of eWOM has become a crucial factor in whether consumers perceive online information as reliable. This is particularly important for purchase decisions in digital marketplaces.

Although existing research on eWOM credibility has examined it across various contexts, it remains fragmented. For example, Roy et al. (2024a) analysed travel reviews, establishing a link between credibility and behavioural intentions in tourism. Castano and Escandon-Barbosa (2022), meanwhile, explored how message quality and consumer traits shape eWOM credibility and engagement. González-Rodríguez et al. (2022) found that credibility reduces risk perceptions and strengthens intentions to visit a destination. Meanwhile, Baharuddin and Yaacob (2020) studied the credibility dimensions that influence online purchases through social media in Malaysia. Siddiqui et al. (2021) further demonstrated that credibility enhances brand image, thereby increasing purchase intention. While these studies provide valuable insights, they are often restricted to specific industries or isolated credibility factors, which limits the generalisability of the findings. To address these limitations, it is essential to systematically

examine the antecedents of credibility. Previous research has highlighted factors such as source homophily (perceived similarity between the reviewer and the consumer), the strength of the argument (the quality and persuasiveness of the message), and the trustworthiness of the source (the perceived reliability of the reviewer) as critical determinants of whether consumers regard eWOM as credible (Alić & Činjurević, 2024; Filieri et al., 2023a; Hong & Pittman, 2020; Roy et al., 2024b; Sharma et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2025). However, no studies were found that integrated these determinants into a unified model to explain how eWOM credibility shapes purchase intention.

This paper aims to explain how eWOM credibility influences purchase intention. Specifically, it explores three antecedents of credibility – source homophily, argument strength and source trustworthiness – and examines how credibility affects purchase intention, both directly and indirectly via the mediating roles of eWOM adoption and product attitude, drawing on the cognition-affect-behaviour (CAB) model.

The study aims to answer the following research question: how does eWOM credibility influence consumer purchase intention, both directly and indirectly, via eWOM adoption and product attitude? In addressing this question, the study contributes to theory by integrating credibility determinants, mediating factors and behavioural outcomes into a single framework, thus closing a clear theoretical gap.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, the theoretical background and research model are outlined. Second, it explains all the factors in the research model and their existing relationships. Third, the methods used in the empirical research are detailed and the findings are presented. Fourth, it discusses the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and directions for future research. Finally, it draws conclusions.

2 Literature review

2.1 Theoretical background and research model

This study adopts the tricomponent CAB model, which was initially proposed by Rosenberg and Hovland (1960). This model provides the theoretical basis for investigating the effect of eWOM credibility on purchase intention. According to the CAB model, consumer decision-making is a sequential process whereby consumers first develop cognitive evaluations that shape affective responses, which ultimately lead to behavioural outcomes.

The CAB model has been widely used in marketing and psychology to examine how information and attitudes influence behaviour (Al-Swidi & Saleh, 2021; Chih et al., 2020; Muliadi et al., 2024; Qiao et al., 2025).

The model consists of three essential components: cognition, affection, and behaviour. Cognition involves an individual's perspective, perception, recognition and understanding of their psychological processes in relation to a particular event. This involves processes such as consciousness, information acquisition, belief development, product comparison, perceived value and knowledge (Chih et al., 2020). Once cognition is established, affective responses, or feelings, are formed. Affection is defined as the emotional reaction to an individual's perceptions of their attitudes. In the CAB model, behaviour refers to the likelihood of acting upon these attitudes (Al-Swidi & Saleh, 2021).

In this study, the CAB model is employed to investigate the effect of eWOM credibility on consumer purchase intention. Specifically, argument strength, source trustworthiness, and homophily are conceptualised as antecedents of eWOM credibility, representing the cognitive component. According to the meta-analysis by Verma et al. (2023), the three primary outcomes of eWOM credibility are eWOM adoption, product attitude and purchase intention. Accordingly, our framework positions eWOM adoption and product attitude as affective components and purchase intention as a behavioural outcome.

2.2 Cognitive component: eWOM credibility

WOM is considered to be a highly effective marketing communication tool because reviews from familiar sources are often considered credible (Eiras Fontenla & Almeida, 2020; Kim et al., 2018; Konecnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2022). With the rise of e-commerce, WOM has evolved into eWOM (Kim et al., 2018), which differs from traditional WOM in that it is primarily disseminated via online platforms and is often posted by individuals who are not known to the consumer (Kim et al., 2018; Viacava et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2022). eWOM can be facilitated through company-owned platforms, online review sites, e-commerce platforms, and social networking sites (Ni & Cheng, 2024).

The credibility of eWOM is measured by how believable, truthful and factual consumers perceive the online reviews to be (Levy & Gvili, 2015). A comprehensive meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of eWOM credibility revealed that it is influenced by both review- and reviewer-related factors (Verma et al., 2023).

This study includes source homophily and source trustworthiness as reviewer-related factors, and argument strength as a review-related factor. Previous research has identified these three factors as critical in determining whether consumers regard eWOM as credible (Alić & Činjurević, 2024; Filieri et al., 2023a; Hong & Pittman, 2020; Roy et al., 2024b; Sharma et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2025).

Homophily is the tendency for individuals within a group to share similar characteristics, such as age, education, gender, lifestyle, race, attitudes and beliefs (Chih et al., 2020). This phenomenon has numerous benefits, such as enhancing positive sentiment, reducing vulnerability and strengthening interpersonal relationships (Hussain et al., 2017). Furthermore, homophily can facilitate the exchange of information via eWOM communication (Kim et al., 2018). In the AI era, AI influencers have become the norm. A study of TikTok users in the Middle East confirmed that AI influencers can build meaningful bonds with users and sometimes even outperform human influencers (Omeish et al., 2025). Another study of 402 users of the popular Chinese cosmetics and clothing website 'Fashion Guide' found that homophily significantly and positively impacts perceived eWOM credibility (Chih et al., 2020). The significant effect of homophily on eWOM credibility was also confirmed by Xiao et al. (2018), whose survey included only individuals who had watched YouTube videos posted by a YouTube influencer. Therefore, the study's first hypothesis is that:

H1. Source homophily has a significant positive effect on perceived eWOM credibility.

Source trustworthiness refers to the positive attributes of a communicator that influence how an audience receives a message (Kim et al., 2018). When it comes to online reviews, consumers tend to trust the opinions of individuals who have greater knowledge, expertise or skills in a specific product area more. As a result, source trustworthiness plays a pivotal role in establishing the credibility of eWOM messages (Teng et al., 2014). Recent research with Fashion Guide fans has confirmed that source trustworthiness is a factor in determining how credible a positive eWOM review is perceived to be (Chih et al., 2020). Roy et al. (2024a) found that source trustworthiness has a greater effect on eWOM credibility for services than for commodities. A meta-analysis by Chauhan and Gupta (2024) found that source trustworthiness positively impacts eWOM credibility. However, the strength of this relationship varies across studies. Therefore, we expect that:

H2. Source trustworthiness has a significant positive effect on perceived eWOM credibility.

The concept of argument strength refers to how persuasive and informative a message is in defending its position to the recipient (Alić & Činjarević, 2024; M. Y. Cheung et al., 2009; Sun et al., 2025). It consists of the totality of evidence supporting an argument (Hong & Pittman, 2020). Specifically, it pertains to the persuasive and informative power of received eWOM reviews. Visual cues or numerical data can reinforce the argument and increase the credibility of eWOM (Teng et al., 2014). Hong and Pittman (2020) proposed measuring argument strength by counting the number of reviews for products on Amazon-like platforms and demonstrated that argument strength enhances the perceived credibility of online reviews. A meta-analysis using the heuristic-systematic model, conducted by Chauhan and Gupta (2024), confirmed that argument strength is a precursor to eWOM credibility. Multiple studies have confirmed that the strength of an argument can influence its credibility (C. Cheung et al., 2012; Daowd et al., 2021; Verma & Dewani, 2021; Xiao et al., 2018). Conversely, less detailed or weaker arguments may reduce credibility. Thus, the third hypothesis states that:

H3. Argument strength has a significant positive effect on perceived eWOM credibility.

2.3 Affective components: eWOM adoption and product attitude

The persuasiveness of eWOM is closely linked to its adoption (Hsu et al., 2016). In order to adopt eWOM, customers must engage with opinions and comments that aid decision-making (Chih et al., 2020). A strong argument is necessary to achieve a persuasive review. As a result, it is reasonable to expect that the strength of an argument may affect the credibility of eWOM and its adoption. Therefore, we propose that:

H4. Argument strength has a significant positive effect on eWOM adoption.

Social media platforms actively encourage the adoption of eWOM by offering features that facilitate information-seeking and interaction. These features include commenting, searching, hashtags and recommendation algorithms (Mendoza-Moreira et al., 2025). Research by Baharuddin, Yaacob (2020), Cheung et al. (2009),

Fang (2014) and Hsu et al. (2016) has found that the perceived credibility of eWOM reviews is critical to their adoption by recipients. An empirical study of Facebook users in Taiwan found that members' trust in the credibility of eWOM reviews has a significant positive impact on their adoption (Hsu et al., 2016). The research results of Chih et al. (2020) also indicated a positive effect of eWOM credibility on adoption. Furthermore, a qualitative study conducted in Thailand confirmed the critical role of eWOM credibility in accepting information (Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020). Bui et al. (2025) and Mendoza-Moreira et al. (2025) also confirmed a significant relationship between eWOM credibility and adoption. However, the relationship between the two may vary across platforms. Therefore, we propose that:

H5. Perceived eWOM credibility has a significant positive effect on eWOM adoption.

Attitude is a complex psychological response that arises from an individual's interactions with people, events and objects (Chih et al., 2020). In the context of this study, 'product attitude' refers to the emotional response that a message recipient has following a product recommendation or review. Teng et al. (2014) suggest consumers will develop a positive attitude towards a product if they perceive a review as credible, whereas an invalid review will result in a negative attitude (Cheung et al., 2009). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H6. Argument strength has a significant positive effect on product attitude.

eWOM reviews can significantly influence consumers' perceptions of a product (Lee & Youn, 2009). Recent research has investigated the factors that contribute to the perceived credibility of online reviews and their impact on product attitudes (Chih et al., 2020). The findings suggest that perceived eWOM credibility has a strong and positive impact on product attitude. However, evidence is mixed on whether this relationship consistently holds across all product categories. Consequently, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H7. Perceived eWOM credibility has a significant positive effect on product attitude.

Substantial scientific evidence suggests that eWOM credibility influences both eWOM adoption and product attitude. However, the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions of these relationships differ.

Credibility is more likely to lead to eWOM adoption when consumers engage in active information processing and decision-making, particularly in contexts involving high levels of involvement or risk, where reviews primarily serve a diagnostic function. In such situations, credible information reduces uncertainty and increases reliance on message content. Conversely, when consumers process reviews more heuristically, credibility exerts a stronger influence on product attitude.

2.4 Behavioural component: purchase intention

Consumers tend to base their purchasing decisions on how much they like eWOM reviews (Hsu et al., 2016). This was confirmed by the results of a meta-analysis conducted by Mendoza-Moreira et al. (2025). Zahrah et al. (2024) found that eWOM on TikTok positively affects consumer purchase intention. A study of 353 users of an online discussion forum in Taiwan found that perceived eWOM credibility had a significant and positive effect on purchase intention (Chih et al., 2013). This effect applies not only to conventional products, but also to environmentally friendly ones (Rahim et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies across various generational cohorts (Alić & Činjurević, 2024; Lam et al., 2019) and among users of different social networking sites (e.g. TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Zalo; Ngo et al., 2024) have confirmed the impact of eWOM credibility on purchase intention. However, evidence also suggests that eWOM credibility alone may not be sufficient to guarantee purchase intention. Other factors, such as brand attitude and the volume of reviews, may also be necessary (Alić & Činjurević, 2024; Filieri et al., 2023a). This suggests that although credibility is a crucial driver of purchase intention, its influence may depend on other factors. Thus, based on the previous empirical evidence, we posit that:

H8. Perceived eWOM credibility has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

The use of eWOM can greatly influence purchasing decisions (Baharuddin & Yaacob, 2020; Ismagilova et al., 2022). Research has shown that adopting eWOM notably impacts one's intention to visit a particular destination (Saidani et al., 2023). Another study (Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020) provided further insight into the relationship between eWOM adoption and purchasing behaviour, identifying five consumer types: prompt shoppers,

in-store shoppers, promotional shoppers, conservative shoppers and remedial shoppers. Roy et al. (2024a) found that adopting useful eWOM leads to positive purchase intentions for services and commodities. However, adoption may not always translate into purchase intention, particularly if users perceive reviews as manipulative or overly promotional. Based on these findings, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H9. eWOM adoption has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

A person's attitude can influence their intention to purchase a product. This can occur for various reasons, such as the opinions of others or external circumstances (Wu & Lee, 2012). Research by Chih et al. (2013) demonstrated that product information that fosters a positive attitude towards a product is highly valuable in enhancing purchase intention. Boyland and Halford (2013) also suggest that a person's attitude towards a product can directly influence their decision to purchase it. A study by Filieri et al. (2023b) revealed that attitude predicts purchase intention. The study was conducted after identifying popular YouTube influencers among millennials. As a result, it is anticipated that:

H10. Product attitude has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

Affect plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between cognition and behaviour (Lan et al., 2021). This provides theoretical support for the expectation that eWOM adoption and product attitude mediate the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention (Figure 1). Consequently, we suggest that:

H11. eWOM adoption mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention.

H12. Product attitude mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention.

3 Methods

The study adopted a quantitative approach, using an online survey as the research instrument. The target population consisted of Lithuanian individuals with personal Facebook accounts. Facebook was selected as the platform for the study because it is the largest virtual community

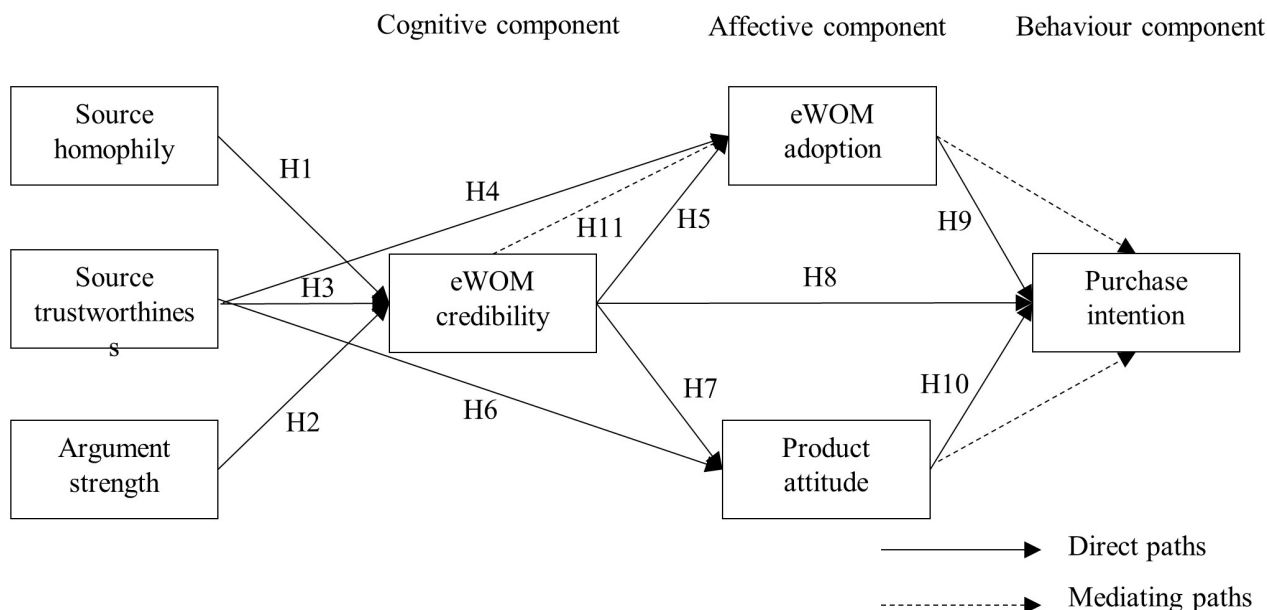


Figure 1. Research model

in Lithuania, hosting a diverse range of users, making it a relevant platform for examining eWOM. In addition to its size, Facebook combines interpersonal network structures with public content diffusion, creating a context in which credibility assessments are shaped by both relational ties and visible engagement cues. While Facebook provides a relevant environment for examining eWOM credibility, this study is confined to a single platform. Therefore, caution should be used when generalising the findings to other platforms.

To ensure contextual relevance, the study focused on a well-known Lithuanian influencer who regularly reviews consumer products on Facebook. A screening question ensured that only respondents familiar with this influencer participated in the survey. Furthermore, to anchor purchase intention in a realistic scenario, participants were asked to respond with reference to a specific product (a food supplement) that the influencer had reviewed during the data collection period.

Convenience sampling was employed as it is a cost-effective and efficient method commonly used in business research (Onofrei et al., 2022). While non-probability sampling limits generalisability, it is appropriate for exploratory, theory-testing studies of eWOM where no sampling frame of social media eWOM consumers exists. The survey was distributed via Facebook groups and forums where users actively discussed products and influencer content. The questionnaire included an

introduction outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations.

A total of 382 questionnaires were completed. After preliminary screening for outliers, biased patterns and straight-lining, 64 responses were removed. The final sample comprised 318 valid responses, which were used for measurement and structural analysis (Supplementary Data 1 – Database).

The 21-item survey questionnaire measured source homophily, argument strength, source trustworthiness, eWOM credibility, eWOM adoption, product attitude and purchase intention (Supplementary Data 2 – Variables and Codebook). All constructs were measured using a 1–5 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). All items were adapted from established scales.

Source homophily was measured using a four-item scale from previous studies (Dhun & Dangi, 2023; Onofrei et al., 2022). This scale measures the extent to which consumers perceive similarity between themselves and the influencer in terms of values, preferences and identity. Argument strength was measured using the construct developed by Durmaz and Yuksel (2017). These items assess the perceived persuasiveness, quality and robustness of the influencer's arguments. Source trustworthiness was measured using the construct developed by Fisher et al. (1979), which captures the communicator's truthfulness, honesty and reliability, while eWOM credibility and eWOM adoption were measured using the construct developed

by Cheung et al. (2009). These scales assess the extent to which reviews are perceived as accurate and believable, and the extent to which consumers are willing to rely on them when making purchase decisions. Items assessing product attitude were adopted from Jiang and Benbasat (2007). These items capture consumers' impressions of the focal product. Purchase intention was assessed using items suggested by Lu et al. (2014). These items measure the likelihood of, and willingness to, purchase the reviewed product in the future.

To ensure semantic equivalence, the items were first translated into Lithuanian and then back-translated. A pilot test with 30 respondents confirmed the clarity of the items. Minor wording changes were then introduced to reduce ambiguity. The reliability and validity of the scales were confirmed (Table 2).

Table 1 displays the demographic composition of the participants. Of the 318 respondents, 76.7% identified as female and 23.3% as male. Regarding age, the majority of those surveyed (50.3%) were aged 21–30. In terms of education, the highest percentages of respondents held graduate (41.8%) and postgraduate (43.4%) qualifications.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics and SmartPLS 4. SPSS was used for screening the data, calculating descriptive statistics and assessing common method bias. SmartPLS 4 was used to estimate the measurement and structural models.

4 Results

4.1 Common method bias

As all variables were measured using perceptual scales from a single respondent, we conducted a test for

common method bias. Harman's single-factor test was used to assess the responses for common method bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The results showed that seven factors explained 47.16% of the total variance in the sample data, which was below the 50% threshold. Therefore, we can confirm that common method bias was not a significant concern in this study. Additionally, we checked for multicollinearity using the variance inflation factor (VIF). All VIF scores (2.474–4.912) were below the threshold value of 5, indicating that multicollinearity was not an issue (Hair et al., 2010).

4.2 Measurement model

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using SmartPLS 4 to analyse the measurement model and assess the reliability of the measurement scales and their convergent and discriminant validity. The original version of eWOM credibility comprised three items. One item demonstrated insufficient factor loading and was therefore removed. For the same reason, one item each was also removed from argument strength and purchase intention. As shown in Table 2, all the remaining factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010), thus validating the model's internal consistency. Regarding convergent validity, the composite reliability (CR) values for all factors exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Chin, 1998), and the average variance extracted (AVE) values met the minimum requirement of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha values for each factor ranged from 0.911 to 0.933, all of which surpassed the minimum threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978), affirming the reliability of the model.

Table 1
Demographic profile of respondents (n=318)

Demographics		Frequency (n)	Percentage
Gender	Male	74	23.3
	Female	244	76.7
Age	18-20	13	4.1
	21-30	160	50.3
	31-40	104	32.7
	41-50	28	8.8
	51+	13	4.1
	High school or lower	11	3.5
Education	Vocational diploma/certification	5	1.6
	Bachelor's degree	164	51.6
	Postgraduate degree	138	43.4
	Other	31	9.7

Table 2
Psychometric properties of measures

Constructs and items	FL	α	CR	AVE
Source homophily		0.921	0.944	0.808
SH1. I feel that the influencer and I have a lot in common	0.898			
SH2. I can easily identify with the influencer	0.918			
SH3. The influencer has similar values to mine	0.887			
SH4. The influencer has similar preferences to mine	0.891			
Argument strength		0.933	0.957	0.881
AS2. Arguments are strong	0.932			
AS3. Arguments are persuasive	0.954			
AS4. Arguments are good	0.930			
Source trustworthiness		0.913	0.945	0.852
ST1. I feel this person is trustworthy	0.920			
ST2. I feel he is honest	0.941			
ST3. I believe he is telling the truth	0.908			
eWOM credibility		0.913	0.939	0.886
EWOMC2. I think the review is accurate	0.937			
EWOMC3. I think the review is credible	0.945			
eWOM adoption		0.924	0.952	0.868
EWOMA1. The review made it easier for me to make a purchase decision	0.935			
EWOMA2. The review enhanced my effectiveness in making a purchase decision	0.941			
EWOMA3. The review motivated me to take action to make a purchase	0.919			
Product attitude		0.911	0.944	0.849
PA1. The product looks good	0.909			
PA2. I have formed a favourable impression of the product	0.914			
PA3. I like the product	0.940			
Purchase intention		0.915	0.946	0.854
PI2. I would consider buying this product	0.916			
PI3. It is possible that I would buy this product	0.940			
PI4. I will purchase it the next time I need it	0.916			

Note. FL: factor loading; M: mean; SD: standard deviation; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted.

With regard to discriminant validity (Table 3), the AVE value was subjected to a square root transformation. This was then compared to the intercorrelation of the construct with the other factors in the research model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As each square root of the AVE value was greater than the correlation between the factors, sufficient discriminant validity was indicated for all measures at the construct level. This shows that the scales accurately assess the intended concepts.

The measurement model presents a positive picture, with a standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), which is a primary criterion in PLS-SEM. With a value of 0.074, it indicates a good model fit (Hair et al., 2019). The R^2 values for the dependent variables indicate the model's strong predictive validity. The model accounts for a significant proportion of the variance in eWOM credibility, eWOM adoption, product attitude and purchase intention at 40.6%, 64.8%, 58.6% and 79.9%,

respectively. The results suggest that the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance, particularly with regard to purchase intention, for which nearly 80% of the outcome is accounted for by the predictors. These findings support the appropriateness of the hypothesised measurement model for further analysis.

4.3 Assessment of the structural model

We used PLS path coefficients and their significance to test the proposed hypotheses. The results are presented in Figure 2 and Table 4.

The predictive relevance was assessed using the Stone–Geisser Q^2 statistic, which was obtained via blindfolding. All endogenous constructs demonstrated positive Q^2 values, confirming the predictive relevance of the model. Specifically, the Q^2 values were 0.393 for eWOM credibility, 0.376 for eWOM adoption, 0.394 for product attitude and 0.343 for purchase intention.

Table 3
Fornell-Larcker criterion

	Source homophily	Argument strength	Source trustworthiness	eWOM credibility	eWOM adoption	Product attitude	Purchase intention
Source homophily	0.899						
Argument strength	0.252	0.939					
Source trustworthiness	0.445	0.346	0.923				
eWOM credibility	0.362	0.562	0.374	0.941			
eWOM adoption	0.350	0.588	0.298	0.805	0.932		
Product attitude	0.348	0.613	0.253	0.766	0.817	0.921	
Purchase intention	0.363	0.588	0.289	0.769	0.889	0.759	0.924

Table 4
Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standard beta	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Source homophily → eWOM credibility	0.182	3.667	0.000	Supported
H2	Source trustworthiness → eWOM credibility	0.120	2.443	0.015	Supported
H3	Argument strength → eWOM credibility	0.501	12.472	0.000	Supported
H4	Argument strength → eWOM adoption	0.176	3.882	0.000	Supported
H5	eWOM credibility → eWOM adoption	0.701	21.268	0.000	Supported
H6	Argument strength → Product attitude	0.249	4.749	0.000	Supported
H7	eWOM credibility → Product attitude	0.619	13.933	0.000	Supported
H8	eWOM credibility → Purchase intention	0.143	3.418	0.001	Supported
H9	eWOM adoption → Purchase intention	0.714	14.063	0.000	Supported
H10	Product attitude → Purchase intention	0.059	1.155	0.248	Rejected

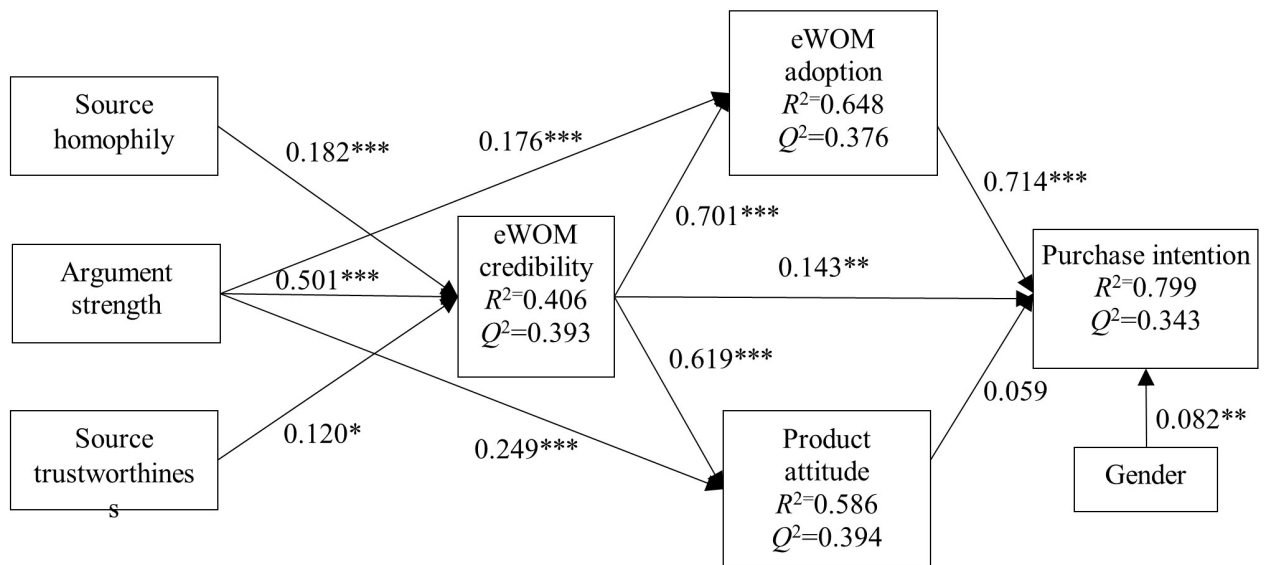


Figure 2. Structural model tests

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results of the study indicate that the hypotheses concerning the impact of source homophily, argument strength and source trustworthiness on eWOM credibility were supported. Of these factors, argument strength was found to be the strongest predictor of eWOM credibility, suggesting that the quality of the message has a more decisive influence than the characteristics of the source. This underlines the importance of well-structured and persuasive arguments in fostering perceptions of credibility. Hypotheses 1–3 concerning the impact of source homophily ($\beta=0.182$, $t=3.667$, $p=0.000$), argument strength ($\beta=0.501$, $t=12.472$, $p=0.000$) and source trustworthiness ($\beta=0.120$, $t=2.443$, $p=0.015$) on eWOM credibility were supported by the results. Argument strength was found to be the strongest predictor of eWOM credibility.

Additionally, argument strength was found to have a positive and significant relationship with eWOM adoption ($\beta=0.176$, $t=3.882$, $p=0.000$) and product attitude ($\beta=0.249$, $t=4.749$, $p=0.000$). Therefore, H4 and H6 were supported, confirming that persuasive and well-structured arguments not only enhance credibility but also directly facilitate both informational adoption and favourable product evaluations. Similarly, eWOM credibility was found to significantly predict eWOM adoption ($\beta=0.701$, $t=21.268$, $p=0.000$) and product attitude ($\beta=0.619$, $t=13.933$, $p=0.000$), lending support to H5 and H7. This finding reinforces the central role of credibility as the primary cognitive driver of both informational reliance and affective product evaluation within the CAB framework.

In terms of behavioural outcomes, eWOM credibility significantly influenced purchase intention

($\beta=0.143$, $t=3.418$, $p=0.001$), while eWOM adoption had a powerful effect on purchase intention ($\beta=0.714$, $t=14.063$, $p=0.000$). These results confirm hypotheses H8 and H9, demonstrating that, while credibility contributes directly to purchase intention, behavioural intention is predominantly activated through the adoption of credible information. However, contrary to expectations, H10 was not supported, as product attitude did not impact purchase intention ($\beta=0.059$, $t=1.155$, $p=0.248$). This result may be explained by the context of the platform and product. Within the Facebook environment, users are exposed to persuasive influencer content embedded in interactive social networks, where visible engagement cues and informational reliance may outweigh purely affective evaluations. In addition, given that the focal product category (food supplements) is functionally oriented and potentially risk-sensitive, consumers may prioritise diagnostic and credible information over general product favourability. Consequently, behavioural intention appears to be driven primarily by eWOM adoption rather than by product attitude in this context.

Regarding the control variables, neither age ($\beta=-0.008$, $t=0.379$, $p=0.705$) nor education ($\beta=0.022$, $t=0.881$, $p=0.379$) significantly affected purchase intention. However, gender significantly influenced purchase intention ($\beta=0.082$, $t=2.991$, $p=0.003$).

To deepen the analysis, we tested the mediation effects of eWOM adoption and product attitude. The mediation results are presented in Table 5.

The indirect effect of eWOM credibility on purchase intention via eWOM adoption was positive and highly significant ($\beta=0.591$, $t=14.385$, $p<0.001$).

Table 5
Mediation effects

Relationship	Standard beta	t-value	p-value	95% confidence interval
Source homophily → eWOM credibility → Purchase intention	0.025	2.388	0.017	[0.007, 0.048]
Source homophily → eWOM credibility → eWOM adoption → Purchase intention	0.108	3.523	0.000	[0.049, 0.171]
Source homophily → eWOM credibility → Product attitude → Purchase intention	0.008	0.988	0.323	[-0.005, 0.026]
Argument strength → eWOM credibility → Purchase intention	0.068	3.063	0.002	[0.026, 0.113]
Argument strength → eWOM credibility → eWOM adoption → Purchase intention	0.296	9.22	0.000	[0.233, 0.364]
Argument strength → eWOM credibility → Product attitude → Purchase intention	0.021	1.082	0.279	[-0.015, 0.063]
Source trustworthiness → eWOM credibility → Purchase intention	0.016	1.95	0.051	[0.002, 0.035]
Source trustworthiness → eWOM credibility → eWOM adoption → Purchase intention	0.071	2.371	0.018	[0.012, 0.130]
Source trustworthiness → eWOM credibility → Product attitude → Purchase intention	0.005	0.924	0.355	[-0.004, 0.018]
eWOM credibility → eWOM adoption → Purchase intention	0.591	14.385	0.000	[0.506, 0.675]
eWOM credibility → Product attitude → Purchase intention	0.042	1.09	0.276	[-0.029, 0.122]

This strongly supports H11, confirming that adoption of eWOM acts as a central mechanism through which credibility translates into purchase intention. This aligns with the CAB framework, whereby the cognitive assessment of eWOM credibility translates into an affective process that directly strengthens purchase decisions.

However, the mediation pathway through product attitude was not significant ($\beta=0.042$, $t=1.090$, $p>0.05$). Therefore, H12 was not supported. This suggests that, although credibility shapes attitudes towards products, these attitudes do not significantly translate into purchase intention. The observed asymmetry indicates that, in this context, behavioural intentions are primarily driven by cognitive acceptance and informational reliance rather than by affective product evaluation.

5 Discussion

In developing the theoretical background, this study adopted the CAB model as its core basis due to its ability to capture the sequence of consumer decision-making. The model distinguishes between cognitive, affective and behavioural components, aligning well with the study's focus on message-related factors, consumer responses and purchase intention. This study extends the application of the CAB model to the context of eWOM, demonstrating its usability and applicability in explaining the impact of credibility cues on consumer behaviour.

The findings of this study affirmed that perceived eWOM credibility is positively impacted by source homophily, argument strength and source trustworthiness. These outcomes are consistent with the findings of previous studies that have also identified the positive influence of content and communicator characteristics (Chih et al., 2020; Daoud et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2018; Teng et al., 2014; Verma & Dewani, 2021). Of these three factors, argument strength was found to be the strongest predictor, highlighting the critical role of message quality compared to source-related attributes.

Research shows that eWOM credibility directly affects purchase intention, with eWOM adoption acting as a mediator. Specifically, we found that higher eWOM credibility leads to greater eWOM adoption, thereby increasing the intention to purchase a product. Our mediation analysis further revealed that eWOM credibility and adoption jointly mediate the link between source trustworthiness and purchase intention. These findings are consistent with a recent study by Roy et al. (2024a),

who also observed a dual mediating effect of eWOM credibility and adoption on source trustworthiness and eWOM outcomes (i.e., intention to share reviews). It is worth noting that our study measured the perception of source trustworthiness as a single construct, whereas the aforementioned study examined perceived sender trust, website trust and organisational reputation as separate factors of source trustworthiness.

Contrary to expectations, product attitude was not found to have a significant effect on purchase intention. This contradicts much of the existing literature, which generally suggests that a favourable attitude towards a product increases the likelihood of purchase (Chih et al., 2013; Filieri et al., 2023b). One possible explanation for this unexpected finding is that credibility and social proof may outweigh individual attitudes in digital contexts. It may also be associated with other factors not considered in this study, such as price sensitivity or promotions.

This study contributes to existing literature by analysing the impact of various eWOM credibility factors, such as source homophily, argument strength and source trustworthiness, on purchase intention. Unlike prior studies, which have examined these factors in isolation or in different combinations, this study integrates them into one single framework. It also identifies eWOM adoption as a mediator in the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention, thereby enriching eWOM research within the CAB model. This contributes to both digital marketing literature and a broader consumer behaviour theory.

The research reveals that, of all the review and reviewer characteristics examined, argument strength has the most significant impact on eWOM credibility. It not only affects eWOM credibility, but also eWOM adoption and product attitude. Since the strongest pathway to purchase intention is through eWOM adoption, marketing managers are advised to enhance informational reliance rather than merely aiming to generate favourable impressions. From a managerial perspective, the findings therefore suggest that marketers and digital strategists should prioritise high-quality arguments in order to improve eWOM credibility, adoption and product attitude. Training influencers to provide more substantive arguments could positively impact both eWOM credibility and adoption. The effects of homophily and trustworthiness are less important, indicating that companies should focus on creating high-quality content rather than merely selecting influencers similar to their target audience.

The unsupported relationship between product attitude and purchase intention further reinforces these implications. Therefore, managers are advised to prioritise campaigns that encourage reliance on and internalisation of credible information over those that rely solely on affective appeals.

While the study provides valuable insights, it is important to recognise its limitations. First, the study focused solely on Facebook users and responses were limited to followers of a single, well-known influencer who reviewed a specific product category (food supplements). This reduces the generalisability of the results to other platforms, cultures and product categories. Consequently, the results should be interpreted in light of the structural and algorithmic characteristics of Facebook, as well as the functional nature of the product category under review. Second, the cross-sectional survey design does not permit causal inferences beyond the tested structural relationships nor does it capture behavioural dynamics over time. In addition, the absence of qualitative data restricts deeper interpretive insights into how consumers cognitively and affectively process eWOM credibility in real decision-making situations.

To test the robustness of the findings, future studies could replicate the suggested model on other social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram. Second, the study relied on convenience sampling, which may have introduced self-selection bias. Future research could consider probability-based sampling or triangulation with qualitative interviews or behavioural data. Third, the study did not explore potential moderators of the effects of eWOM credibility, such as consumer or situational factors (e.g. level of involvement, perceived risk and cultural orientation). Future studies could investigate the moderating impact of consumers' socio-demographic characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and time constraints or uncertainty, in order to address this gap and test alternative mediation pathways. Ultimately, incorporating such moderators into the model proposed in this study could provide valuable insights into eWOM credibility.

6 Conclusions

This study makes a valuable contribution to existing literature by introducing and testing a framework that evaluates the impact of source homophily, argument strength and source trustworthiness on purchase intention. Our framework also considers the mediating roles of eWOM credibility, eWOM adoption and product attitude.

We hypothesised that source homophily, argument strength and source trustworthiness would predict eWOM credibility, which would then have a significant direct and indirect effect on purchase intention. Our results support these predictions. However, we also anticipated that eWOM adoption and product attitude might mediate the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention. However, our findings indicate that only eWOM adoption serves as a mediator.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary material accompanies this paper.

Supplementary Data 1 – Database

Supplementary Data 2 – Variables and Codebook

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Authors:

1. Neringa Vilkaite-Vaitone, Chief Researcher, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VILNIUS TECH), Vilnius, Lithuania.
E-mail: vilkaite-vaitone@vilniustech.lt

Authors' contributions:

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