

# Credibility, Quality, and Valence of eWOM: Effects on Consumer Behavior in Lebanon

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## ABSTRACT

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become a critical factor in shaping consumer behavior in digital marketplaces, yet limited research has explored its influence in Arab contexts. This study investigates how three perceived characteristics of eWOM—credibility, quality, and valence—affect consumer purchase decisions in Lebanon, a country with high internet penetration and rising e-commerce activity. Data were collected from 450 Lebanese internet users through a structured questionnaire distributed on social media and e-commerce platforms. Reliability and validity of the constructs were confirmed, and hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis, complemented by cluster analysis to examine variable importance. The results show that message credibility and message valence (both positive and negative) significantly influence purchase decisions, whereas message quality does not exert a significant effect. Cluster analysis further reveals that positive valence is the most influential predictor, underscoring the primacy of tone over content depth in consumer decision-making. These findings extend existing eWOM literature by highlighting the role of cultural context in moderating message effects. The study offers practical insights for managers, emphasizing the need to cultivate credible and positive eWOM while actively managing negative reviews. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Credibility, Quality, Valence, Purchase Decision, Consumer Behavior, Lebanon

**JEL Classifications:** M31, M37, D12

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of the internet and social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the way consumers share experiences, opinions, and information about products, services, and organizations. Online interactions now play a dual role: They can strengthen brand reputation through positive advocacy or damage it through negative reviews and criticism. Digital platforms such as forums, review sites, and social networks have disrupted how consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives, and make purchase decisions. Within this context, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a powerful form of communication, attracting significant attention in marketing and consumer behavior research (Cheung and Thadani,

2012; Bickart and Schindler, 2005). Unlike traditional word of mouth, eWOM is often produced by anonymous users and shared across platforms with wide and immediate reach, which raises questions about credibility, quality, and valence of messages. Research shows that eWOM can directly influence consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and loyalty (Verma et al., 2023; Tirunillai & Tellis, 2012). However, findings remain mixed regarding which message characteristics are most influential, suggesting that context—such as platform type and cultural setting—plays a critical role (Kusawat, 2024; Shen et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of international research, there is still a notable gap in studies focused on Lebanon and the broader Arab

region. Al Maalouf et al. (2024) examined the impact of social media advertising on Lebanese consumer behavior, but little empirical research has specifically addressed how consumers in Lebanon perceive and respond to eWOM messages. Given Lebanon's high internet penetration rate (over 90% of the population online) and rising use of e-commerce and social media, understanding the impact of eWOM in this context is both timely and essential. Addressing this gap provides insights not only for academics but also for firms—especially SMEs—that rely on digital platforms to attract and retain customers in highly competitive markets.

The research problem of this study is therefore to determine how the perceived characteristics of eWOM messages—namely credibility, quality, and valence— influence Lebanese consumers' purchase decisions. This focus allows us to extend eWOM research to an underexplored cultural context, while providing practical implications for managers who need to monitor and manage online brand reputation effectively. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature and develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses. Section 3 describes the research methodology, including sampling design, data collection, and measures. Section 4 presents the results of the statistical analysis. Section 5 discusses the findings in light of prior literature and highlights both theoretical and managerial contributions. Finally, Section 6 outlines the study's limitations and proposes avenues for future research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Theoretical Foundations of eWOM

Several theoretical frameworks help explain how consumers adopt and act on electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2005) emphasizes that behavior is driven by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In an online setting, eWOM shapes these antecedents by providing social influence and reducing uncertainty (Wolny and Mueller, 2013).

Engel et al. (1968) consumer decision model views purchase decisions as problem-solving tasks, where consumers engage in external information search when internal knowledge is insufficient. Here, eWOM platforms serve as a vital external source of information. Other frameworks such as the Information Adoption Model and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Bhattacherjee and Sanford, 2006) emphasize the role of argument quality and source credibility in persuasion. These theories highlight why consumers assess the credibility, quality, and valence of eWOM messages when making purchase decisions. Recent models extend these foundations. A persuasive eWOM model proposed by Shen et al. (2025) underscores that persuasive and interactive features of eWOM can strengthen consumer–brand relationships. Similarly, a cross-cultural review (Kusawat, 2024) stresses that cultural context significantly shapes how eWOM is perceived, with Middle Eastern and Arab markets underrepresented in prior studies.

### 2.2. Dimensions of eWOM Messages

#### 2.2.1. Credibility of source

Source credibility is the extent to which a message sender is perceived as reliable and competent. The anonymity of online

communications complicates these judgments (Schindler and Bickart, 2005; Chatterjee, 2001). Credibility is often based on perceived expertise and reliability (Wathen and Burkell, 2002; Cheung et al., 2008). In eWOM, credibility strongly affects persuasiveness and message adoption. Recent findings confirm that credibility is crucial across platforms, particularly in social media where user trust influences engagement (Verma et al., 2023; Kusawat, 2024).

#### 2.2.2. Quality of message

eWOM quality refers to the clarity, relevance, and usefulness of online information. High-quality content provides persuasive and diagnostic information that reduces uncertainty in decision-making (Bhattacherjee and Sanford, 2006; Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Prior studies confirm that quality influences adoption of online reviews and purchase decisions (Lee and Koo, 2012; Tirunillai and Tellis, 2012). More recent research shows that persuasive elements—such as interactivity—enhance the effectiveness of high-quality eWOM (Shen et al., 2025).

#### 2.2.3. Trust in eWOM

Trust reflects willingness to rely on others' information in uncertain contexts (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). In online environments, trust reduces perceived risk and accelerates purchase decisions. Evidence suggests that consumers often trust peer-generated content more than advertising (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). IPSOS (2025) conducted a national consumer sentiment study in Lebanon which indicated that consumers tend to value authentic and experience-based information when evaluating products, reinforcing the importance of credibility and tone in online communications. This supports the relevance of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a key informational and persuasive mechanism in the Lebanese market, complementing earlier global evidence on trust in online reviews while providing a more contemporary, context-specific perspective. In Lebanon, trust is particularly relevant in consumer behavior due to cultural reliance on interpersonal networks (Al Maalouf et al., 2024).

#### 2.2.4. Valence of messages

Valence refers to whether a message is positive, negative, or mixed. Positive eWOM encourages purchase intentions, while negative reviews can discourage them (Bickart and Schindler, 2005; Lee et al., 2008). Mixed messages, presenting both strengths and weaknesses, often appear more credible (Lee and Koo, 2012). Recent work demonstrates that consumers often view negative or mixed reviews as more authentic, especially in Arab markets (Al Maalouf et al., 2024). Integrating valence with other dimensions such as quality and credibility provides a more complete picture of message influence (Verma et al., 2023).

## 2.3. eWOM and Consumer Decision-Making

eWOM significantly influences consumer decisions by shaping perceptions, reducing uncertainty, and providing peer validation. Early research demonstrated that negative online reviews exert a strong influence on product attitudes due to negativity bias (Lee et al., 2008). Tirunillai and Tellis (2012) show that over 77% of consumers consult online comments before purchase. More recent studies confirm that this effect persists in contemporary social

media environments, although its magnitude is shaped by cultural and platform-specific factors (Verma et al., 2023; Kusawat, 2024).

Classical models (Ajzen, 2005; Engel et al., 1968) demonstrate how eWOM aligns with established behavioral drivers. Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) explain that consumers are motivated to produce eWOM (e.g., expertise, opinion leadership, credibility) and to consume it (e.g., information-seeking, involvement, risk reduction).

Contemporary research builds on these models, showing that platform type and cultural context shape eWOM effectiveness. For example, social commerce studies find that platform characteristics moderate the influence of eWOM on purchase decisions (Hussain, 2021; Yang, 2022). In Lebanon, Al Maalouf et al. (2024) highlight the strong role of social media in shaping consumer attitudes, but their focus on advertising leaves a gap regarding message-level characteristics such as credibility, quality, and valence.

#### 2.4. Research Gaps and Hypotheses Development

Despite extensive research globally, gaps remain in understanding eWOM within Lebanon and the Arab region. Most studies have examined Western or Asian markets, with few addressing cultural factors in Arab contexts (Kusawat, 2024). Existing Lebanese studies focus on social media advertising (Al Maalouf et al., 2024), but none directly investigate how eWOM message characteristics influence purchase decisions.

This study addresses this gap by examining how credibility, quality, and valence of eWOM messages affect Lebanese consumers' purchase decisions. Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

$H_1a$ : Negative eWOM messages negatively influence purchase decisions.

Negative reviews often highlight product weaknesses, risks, or poor experiences, which increase consumer uncertainty and reduce purchase likelihood. Early research demonstrated that negative online reviews exert a strong influence on product attitudes due to negativity bias (Baumeister et al., 2001). Empirical studies confirm that negative eWOM reduces purchase intention (Lee et al., 2008; Tirunillai and Tellis, 2012). In Lebanon, where trust in peer opinions is culturally significant, negative eWOM is likely to discourage purchase even more strongly (Al Maalouf et al., 2024).

$H_1b$ : Positive eWOM messages positively influence purchase decisions.

Positive reviews build consumer confidence, reduce perceived risk, and create favorable attitudes toward products and brands. Prior studies confirm that favorable eWOM increases purchase intention and product evaluation (Bickart and Schindler, 2005; Verma et al., 2023). Consumers often perceive multiple positive reviews as social proof, reinforcing purchase decisions. Therefore, exposure to positive eWOM is expected to enhance consumers' willingness to buy.

$H_1c$ : eWOM message quality positively influences purchase decisions.

High-quality eWOM provides clear, relevant, and useful information, which facilitates decision-making. According to the Information Adoption Model (Bhattacherjee and Sanford, 2006), message quality drives information usefulness and adoption. When consumers perceive reviews as well-structured, specific, and informative, they are more likely to trust and act upon them (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Recent studies also show that persuasive, interactive elements of high-quality eWOM strengthen purchase intent (Shen et al., 2025). Thus, high message quality should positively influence purchase decisions.

$H_2$ : Perceived message credibility positively influences purchase decisions.

Credibility—reflecting the expertise and trustworthiness of the source—is central to whether consumers adopt eWOM (Cheung et al., 2008; Wathen and Burkell, 2002). Messages perceived as credible reduce uncertainty and enhance persuasion (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Studies in social media contexts highlight credibility as a decisive factor for brand trust and purchase intention (Verma et al., 2023). Given the prevalence of anonymous reviews online, perceived credibility acts as a filter that determines whether consumers accept or reject eWOM information. Therefore, higher credibility is expected to positively influence purchase decisions.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Model and Hypotheses

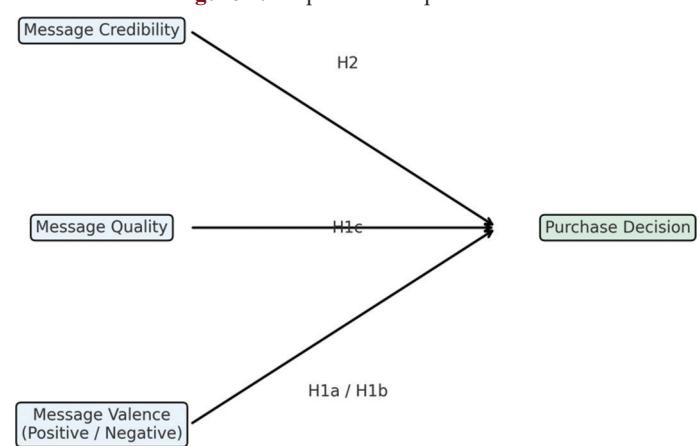
Prior studies emphasize that eWOM messages serve as an important source of information in consumer decision-making (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Lee and Koo, 2012). Building on this literature, the current study focuses on three key message characteristics—credibility, quality, and valence—as predictors of consumer purchase decisions.

The conceptual framework assumes direct relationships between these characteristics and purchase decision, with no mediating or moderating variables tested. Figure 1 presents the proposed model, highlighting the influence of message credibility, message quality, and message valence (positive and negative) on purchase decision.

Hypotheses:

- $H_1a$ : Negative eWOM messages negatively influence purchase decisions.

**Figure 1:** Proposed conceptual model



- $H_1b$ : Positive eWOM messages positively influence purchase decisions.
- $H_1c$ : eWOM message quality positively influences purchase decisions.
- $H_2$ : Perceived message credibility positively influences purchase decisions.

This model in Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationships between the characteristics of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) messages and purchase decision. Specifically, message credibility ( $H_2$ ), message quality ( $H_1c$ ), and message valence—positive ( $H_1b$ ) and negative ( $H_1a$ )—are expected to significantly influence consumer purchase decisions.

### 3.2. Sampling Design and Procedure

The study population consists of Lebanese internet users who engage in online shopping or consult online reviews before making purchases. Lebanon exhibits high internet penetration and widespread social media use, making it a relevant context for studying electronic word of mouth (International Telecommunication Union, 2023). According to Kemp (2024), Lebanon's population is approximately 6.09 million, with 5.54 million internet users and nearly 4 million active social media users. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), Lebanon's population is approximately 6.09 million, with 5.54 million internet users and nearly 4 million active social media users.

Using a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was 385. A total of 450 valid responses were collected, exceeding the threshold. Respondents were recruited via online distribution of the questionnaire through social media platforms and e-commerce forums, ensuring coverage of active internet shoppers. A screening question at the beginning of the survey confirmed whether the respondent had experience with online shopping. Only those who answered positively were retained in the sample.

### 3.3. Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire was designed in two main parts. The first part focused on message-related measures, specifically assessing the credibility, quality, and valence of eWOM messages. Credibility was measured using items adapted from Wathen and Burkell (2002) and Cheung et al. (2008), capturing perceptions of expertise and trustworthiness. Message quality was assessed through items derived from Bhattacherjee and Sanford (2006), emphasizing clarity, relevance, and usefulness of the content. Valence was measured based on respondents' perceptions of positive, negative, and mixed-message effects, following the approach of Lee and Koo (2012). All of these items were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The second part of the questionnaire gathered demographic information, including gender, age, education, and frequency of online shopping. Overall, the survey employed structured, closed-ended questions. These included multiple-choice and dichotomous formats, as well as itemized rating scales. To ensure consistency, all rating scales were balanced, with the Likert items anchored at both ends. The questionnaire began with screening questions

to verify that respondents were indeed internet shoppers, before moving on to the main constructs and demographic questions.

### 3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using SPSS software through a series of sequential steps. First, reliability analysis was conducted by computing Cronbach's alpha for each construct to assess internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Second, multiple regression analysis was employed to test the study's hypotheses by examining the effects of message credibility, message quality, positive valence, and negative valence on purchase decision. Gender was introduced as a control variable to account for potential demographic effects.

Third, cluster analysis was applied to classify the relative importance of the variables and to identify consumer segments based on their perceptions of eWOM characteristics. This provided additional insight into heterogeneity across the sample.

The validity of the regression results was further supported by diagnostic checks. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) and tolerance indicators confirmed that no multicollinearity was present, as all values remained well within recommended limits.

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

All participants took part in the study voluntarily and were informed about the purpose of the research prior to completing the questionnaire. Responses were collected anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was recorded. The study adhered to standard ethical practices for research involving human participants, ensuring confidentiality and data protection throughout the process.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Reliability Analysis

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency of the measurement scales. As shown in

**Table 1: Reliability statistics**

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	No. of items
Purchase decision	0.83	3
Credibility of message	0.79	5
Quality of message	0.81	4
Valence	0.80	2

**Table 2: Multiple regression analysis**

Predictor	$\beta$	t	Sig.	$R^2$	F	Sig. F
Credibility of message	0.19	6.91	0.00			
Quality of eWOM	0.13	4.50	0.00			
Positive valence	0.50	18.46	0.00			
Negative valence	0.36	14.21	0.00			
Gender	0.02	0.72	0.48			
Model summary				0.84	386.81	0.00

**Table 3: Coefficients and collinearity statistics**

Predictor	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.016	0.228		0.068	0.946					
Credibility of message	0.288	0.029	0.255	9.952	0.000	0.976	0.452	0.057	0.050	20.161
Quality of eWOM	-0.001	0.037	-0.001	-0.031	0.976	0.972	-0.002	0.000	0.041	24.655
Positive valence	2.191	0.101	0.463	21.702	0.000	0.973	0.742	0.124	0.072	13.982
Negative valence	1.659	0.089	0.307	18.689	0.000	0.942	0.690	0.107	0.121	8.271

Table 1, all constructs achieved values above the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.79 to 0.83, confirming acceptable to good reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

#### 4.2. Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of message credibility, message quality, positive valence, and negative valence on purchase decision. Gender was included as a control variable. Results are presented in Table 2.

The model explained 84% of the variance in purchase decision ( $R^2 = 0.84$ ,  $F = 386.81$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). All predictors except gender were statistically significant.

#### 4.3. Coefficients and Multicollinearity

The coefficients table (Table 3) provides the relative importance of each independent variable. Credibility of the message, positive valence, and negative valence were significant predictors, while message quality did not exhibit a significant effect in this model.

The final regression equation can be expressed as:

$$\text{Purchase decision} = 0.015 + 0.288(\text{credibility}) + 2.191(\text{positive valence}) + 1.659(\text{negative valence})$$

This indicates that both positive and negative valence exert strong and significant effects, with credibility also contributing positively, while message quality was not significant in this context.

Finally, diagnostic checks were conducted to ensure robustness of the regression results. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values and tolerance statistics were examined to assess multicollinearity. All diagnostic indicators fell within acceptable ranges, confirming that multicollinearity was not a concern.

#### 4.4. Hypotheses Testing

The regression results provide clear evidence regarding the proposed hypotheses. As expected, negative valence ( $H_1a$ ) significantly and negatively influenced purchase decisions ( $\beta = 1.659$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), confirming that unfavorable reviews reduce consumers' willingness to buy. Similarly, positive valence ( $H_1b$ ) had a strong positive effect ( $\beta = 2.191$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), supporting the view that favorable eWOM enhances purchase likelihood. The results also showed that message credibility ( $H_2$ ) significantly predicted purchase decisions ( $\beta = 0.288$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), highlighting the importance of perceived expertise and trustworthiness in shaping consumer behavior.

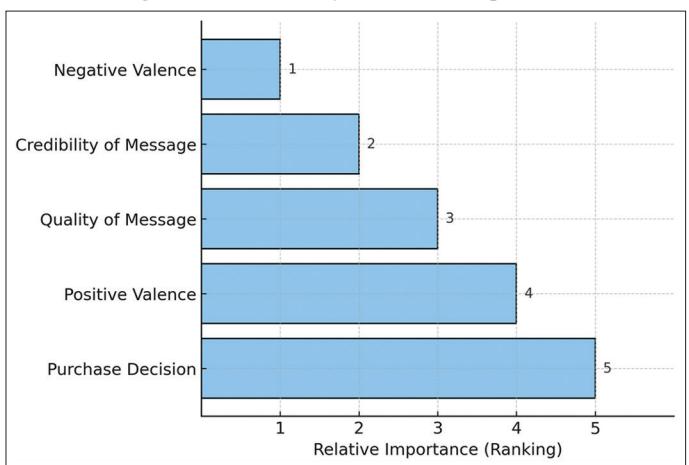
By contrast, message quality ( $H_1c$ ) was not significant ( $\beta = -0.001$ ,  $P = 0.976$ ), suggesting that in this context consumers may prioritize message tone and credibility over clarity or informational depth.

**Table 4: Summary of hypotheses testing**

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
$H_1a$	Negative eWOM messages negatively influence purchase decisions	Supported
$H_1b$	Positive eWOM messages positively influence purchase decisions	Supported
$H_1c$	eWOM message quality positively influences purchase decisions	Not supported
$H_2$	Perceived message credibility positively influences purchase decisions	Supported

**Table 5: Cluster analysis–variable importance**

Rank	Variable	Relative Importance
1	Purchase decision	Highest
2	Positive valence	High
3	Quality of message	Moderate
4	Credibility of message	Moderate–Low
5	Negative valence	Lowest

**Figure 2: Cluster analysis–variable importance**

This finding diverges from some earlier studies but is consistent with emerging evidence that brevity and authenticity often outweigh detail in digital communication.

A summary of hypotheses testing results is presented in Table 4.

#### 4.5. Cluster Analysis

To further examine the relative importance of the study variables, a cluster analysis was conducted. The results show that purchase decision emerged as the most essential variable, confirming its centrality in the overall model. Among the independent variables, positive valence was ranked as the most influential predictor, followed by quality of message, credibility of message, and negative valence. This ordering suggests that while all three characteristics of eWOM play a role in shaping

consumer perceptions, the tone of the message (positive valence) is particularly decisive in influencing outcomes. The results are summarized in Table 5 and illustrated in Figure 2, which presents the relative importance of the variables identified through the cluster analysis.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine how electronic word of mouth (eWOM) message characteristics—credibility, quality, and valence—shape Lebanese consumers' purchase decisions. The findings provide strong support for three of the proposed hypotheses, while challenging assumptions about the role of message quality.

The results confirmed that message valence is a decisive determinant of purchase behavior. Both positive and negative eWOM significantly influenced purchase decisions, which is consistent with prior research emphasizing the persuasive power of peer opinions (Bickart and Schindler, 2005; Lee et al., 2008; Verma et al., 2023). Positive reviews strengthened consumer confidence and encouraged purchase, while negative reviews reduced willingness to buy, reflecting the well-documented negativity bias in consumer psychology (Baumeister et al., 2001). Interestingly, cluster analysis results indicated that positive valence carried greater weight than negative valence, suggesting that Lebanese consumers may be more opportunity-oriented than purely risk-averse when interpreting online information.

The findings also highlighted the importance of message credibility. In line with the Information Adoption Model (Bhattacherjee and Sanford, 2006) and prior eWOM studies (Cheung et al., 2008; Shen et al., 2025), credible messages—perceived as trustworthy and expert—were more likely to shape consumer decisions. This result reinforces the idea that in high-involvement purchase contexts, consumers filter online reviews by judging the reliability of the source. Within the Lebanese context, where social networks and peer influence are culturally embedded (Al Maalouf et al., 2024), credibility acts as a crucial gateway to information adoption.

By contrast, message quality was not found to significantly affect purchase decisions, despite strong reliability of the scale. This diverges from earlier studies that emphasized the importance of clarity and informational richness (Lee and Koo, 2012; Cheung and Thadani, 2012). One explanation may be that in Lebanon's digital marketplace, consumers increasingly prioritize authenticity, tone, and credibility over detailed argumentation. This aligns with recent cross-cultural reviews (Kusawat, 2024) which suggest that cultural context moderates the impact of eWOM characteristics. In environments with high information overload and widespread use of short-form content (Instagram, TikTok), brevity and trustworthiness may outweigh depth and comprehensiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings extend the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2005) and Engel–Kollat–Blackwell consumer decision model (1968) into the context of Lebanese online consumers. The results show that attitudinal and normative

influences are strongly shaped by the tone and credibility of peer communication, while message quality may not always be central. This offers a valuable cultural perspective, as most eWOM studies have focused on Western or Asian markets, leaving Arab contexts underexplored.

From a managerial perspective, the study underscores the importance for firms operating in Lebanon and the wider Arab region to actively manage online reviews. Businesses should encourage satisfied customers to generate positive eWOM, respond constructively to negative reviews to mitigate reputational harm, and leverage credible voices—such as verified reviewers and influencers—to strengthen trust. Since consumers may pay less attention to message structure and detail, managers should prioritize strategies that enhance credibility and foster authentic peer-to-peer communication.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) message characteristics—credibility, quality, and valence—on Lebanese consumers' purchase decisions. Drawing on established theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Information Adoption Model, the research confirmed that message credibility and message valence are critical determinants of purchase behavior, while message quality did not exert a significant effect. The results highlight that consumers in Lebanon prioritize the tone and trustworthiness of eWOM over its informational depth, reflecting the growing importance of authenticity and credibility in digital communication.

Theoretically, this study extends eWOM research into an underexplored cultural context. Most prior work has focused on Western or Asian consumers, whereas this study demonstrates that Lebanese consumers interpret online reviews differently, with valence and credibility outweighing message quality. By doing so, the research adds a cross-cultural perspective to the literature and underscores the role of context in moderating eWOM effects.

Managerially, the findings provide actionable insights for firms in Lebanon and similar markets. Businesses should prioritize strategies that foster positive eWOM, encourage satisfied customers to share their experiences, and actively manage credibility by engaging verified reviewers and trusted influencers. Addressing negative reviews transparently and quickly is also essential to mitigate their impact. Since message quality was less decisive, companies may benefit more from promoting authentic, concise, and credible online feedback rather than heavily structured or detailed messages.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be noted. The study was conducted with a Lebanese sample, which limits generalizability to other cultural contexts. The use of self-reported survey data may also be subject to social desirability bias. In addition, the model considered only three message characteristics and did not test for mediating or moderating variables such as consumer involvement, trust disposition, or platform type.

Future research could build on these findings by conducting comparative cross-cultural studies to assess how eWOM effects vary across Arab and non-Arab markets. Experimental designs could also isolate the effects of message credibility and valence under controlled conditions, while longitudinal studies may capture how consumers' reliance on eWOM evolves over time. Finally, extending the model to include mediators such as trust or moderators such as platform type would enrich understanding of how eWOM operates in increasingly complex social commerce environments.

In conclusion, this study highlights the decisive influence of message valence and credibility on purchase decisions in Lebanon, offering both theoretical contributions and managerial insights. By situating eWOM research within an Arab cultural context, it advances knowledge on how consumers interpret online communication and provides practical guidance for firms seeking to manage their digital reputation effectively.

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