



## Impact of e-WOM on eco-friendly product purchases: A review of sustainability-driven consumer behaviour

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### Abstract

This study delves into the role of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in influencing consumer behavior toward eco-friendly product purchases. It explores the dynamic interplay between sustainability awareness, trust, and digital communication, highlighting the growing preference for environmentally sound alternatives. The systematic review synthesizes findings from various academic sources to address three pivotal research questions. The analysis identifies critical dimensions like source credibility, message framing, and platform dynamics as key determinants in enhancing consumer trust and purchase intent. It also underscores the relevance of cultural contexts, demonstrating that e-WOM's effectiveness can vary significantly across regions due to differing socio-cultural norms. The review's findings emphasize the dual role of digital platforms: social media facilitates real-time engagement, while review sites act as detailed decision-making aids for eco-conscious consumers. Positive e-WOM builds trust and mitigates skepticism, fostering consumer confidence amidst prevalent concerns about greenwashing. By bridging the attitude-behavior gap, e-WOM emerges as a potent tool for promoting sustainable consumption practices. The study concludes with actionable insights for marketers to optimize e-WOM strategies, including leveraging influencer partnerships and ensuring transparency. Recommendations for future research suggest integrating emerging technologies like AI to enhance e-WOM's credibility and exploring cultural variability through longitudinal studies.

**Keywords:** e-WOM, consumer behavior, eco-friendly products, sustainability.

### Introduction

The escalating environmental concerns and the palpable impact of ecological degradation have catalyzed a significant shift in consumer behavior, fostering a burgeoning interest in eco-friendly products and sustainable consumption practices (Nittala & Moturu, 2021<sup>[14]</sup>; Rathnayaka & Wijethunga, 2020<sup>[16]</sup>; Salini & Thomas, 2017)<sup>[17]</sup>. This transition towards sustainability necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence consumers' adoption of eco-products, acknowledging that consumption patterns exert considerable environmental stress (Hojnik *et al.*, 2019)<sup>[10]</sup>. In response, businesses are compelled to integrate environmental considerations into their core strategies, recognizing that consumers are increasingly factoring in the environmental impact of products throughout their lifecycle, from raw material sourcing to disposal (Chen, 2024)<sup>[5]</sup>. This consciousness is reshaping markets and propelling the demand for ecologically sound alternatives (Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020)<sup>[9]</sup>. The surge in environmental awareness has led to the emergence of "green consumers," a demographic keenly attuned to the environmental consequences of their purchasing decisions (Boztepe, 2016)<sup>[1]</sup>. These consumers actively seek out products and brands that align with their environmental values, compelling companies to adopt more sustainable practices to cater to this growing segment (Esmaeilpour & Bahmiary, 2017)<sup>[8]</sup>. Furthermore, the proliferation of social media and online platforms has amplified the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on consumer behavior, particularly concerning eco-friendly products (Bryła *et al.*, 2022)<sup>[3]</sup>.

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has emerged as a potent force in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchase decisions, especially within the realm of eco-friendly products, as consumers actively seek

information and validation from online sources before making their purchasing decisions (Wagdi *et al.*, 2022)<sup>[21]</sup>. The ease with which consumers can now share opinions, experiences, and recommendations online has created a dynamic information ecosystem that can significantly impact brand reputation and product adoption (Alalwan *et al.*, 2016)<sup>[1]</sup>. Despite a reported inclination towards green products among a substantial portion of consumers, actual purchase rates remain comparatively low, underscoring the need for deeper investigation into the factors that drive or hinder the translation of environmental consciousness into tangible purchasing behavior (Singh *et al.*, 2023)<sup>[18]</sup>. Consumer demand for products that are not only effective but also produced in socially responsible ways is growing, reflecting an understanding that the consumption of eco-friendly products contributes to the long-term health of the environment (Mahmud, 2024)<sup>[12]</sup>. This discrepancy suggests that while consumers may express positive attitudes towards sustainability, other factors such as price, perceived quality, convenience, and access to information play critical roles in the ultimate purchase decision (Joshi & Rahman, 2015)<sup>[11]</sup>.

To effectively promote sustainable consumption, it is critical to understand how consumers perceive environmentally friendly products and how these perceptions influence their buying behavior. Consumers often view green products as being of higher quality and are willing to pay a premium for them, indicating a belief that environmental benefits justify the additional cost (Nguyen & Hoang, 2023<sup>[13]</sup>; Somany, 2023)<sup>[19]</sup>. While price is undoubtedly a key consideration, research indicates that it is not the sole determinant in the consumer's decision-making process (Dondapat & Basariya, 2019)<sup>[7]</sup>. The environmental consciousness of consumers has become an essential factor, influencing their choices and leading them to favor products

that contribute to environmental preservation (Dondapat & Basariya, 2019) <sup>[7]</sup>. Situational factors can impede environmentally responsible purchasing, diminishing the influence of positive environmental attitudes, which points to the complexity of consumer decision-making in the context of green purchases (Joshi & Rahman, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>. The interplay of environmental attitudes, product attributes, and situational factors creates a multifaceted challenge in understanding and predicting consumer behavior in the green market (Joshi & Rahman, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>. It is essential to examine why environmental attitudes have a weaker influence on consumer green purchase behaviour, highlighting possible factors such as price and availability of the product, and social influences among others that lead to the discrepancy between consumer attitude and purchase behaviour (Joshi & Rahman, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>. Consumers' perceptions are significantly affected by their self-controlled behavior and the behavior of their peer groups and family members (Chauhan & Bhagat, 2018) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has emerged as a critical source of information and influence, playing a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving purchase decisions in the context of eco-friendly products, and can potentially narrow the gap between attitudes and actual purchasing behavior (Suki, 2015) <sup>[20]</sup>. The aim of this review is to examine the impact of e-WOM on consumer behaviour towards eco-friendly products, considering the significance of sustainability-driven consumer behavior and the growing awareness of environmental challenges. Consumers demonstrate a greater inclination to procure green products when they possess a favorable attitude toward the environment (Paço *et al.*, 2009) <sup>[15]</sup>. The positive attitude and trust in eco-friendly practices play a vital role in bridging the gap between consumer knowledge and behavior (Mahmud, 2024 <sup>[12]</sup>; Singh *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[18]</sup>. Factors such as environmental awareness, the desire to make a positive impact, and a favorable attitude toward the environment all contribute to encouraging consumers to buy eco-friendly products (Singh *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[18]</sup>.

This paper presents a systematic literature review aimed at answering the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How does e-WOM affect consumer trust and purchasing decisions for eco-friendly products?

**RQ2:** What factors (e.g., message valence, source credibility, platform type) moderate this influence?

**RQ3:** What gaps exist in the current literature that warrant further investigation?

## Literature Review

Research indicates that e-WOM significantly affects consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, particularly for eco-friendly products. For instance, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) <sup>[38]</sup> found that user-generated positive e-WOM on social media platforms, such as Facebook, positively influences brand attitude and purchase intention, suggesting a strong relationship between e-WOM and purchasing decisions. This is further supported by Ismagilova *et al.* (2019) <sup>[37]</sup>, who conducted a meta-analysis confirming the overall positive impact of e-WOM on purchase intentions across various studies.

In the specific context of eco-friendly products, Ricci *et al.* (2018) <sup>[24]</sup> explored how trust influences consumer intentions to purchase these products, highlighting the pivotal role of e-WOM in establishing this trust. Similarly,

Quaye and Mensah (2019) <sup>[26]</sup> affirmed that e-WOM has a significant effect on purchasing decisions within the Saudi Arabian consumer market, indicating that geographical and cultural factors may also moderate this relationship.

The literature suggests several moderating factors that affect the influence of e-WOM on consumer behavior. Message valence and source credibility are two critical factors highlighted in numerous studies. Heo and Muralidharan (2019) <sup>[29]</sup> emphasized that credible sources and positively framed messages significantly enhance consumer attitudes towards eco-friendly products. This aligns with findings from Prakash *et al.* (2019) <sup>[27]</sup>, where source credibility was shown to influence consumer attitudes and intentions toward eco-friendly packaged products.

Moreover, the platform type also plays a moderating role in e-WOM effectiveness. For example, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) <sup>[38]</sup> implied that the platform (e.g., Facebook) moderates the influence of e-WOM, although they did not provide a comprehensive analysis of other potential moderating factors like message valence or source credibility. This gap is echoed in the findings of Almana and Mirza (2013), who discussed the impact of message characteristics on consumer purchasing decisions but did not focus specifically on eco-friendly products.

Additionally, cultural influences have been highlighted as moderating factors in e-WOM's effectiveness. Lo and Yao (2019) examined how cultural traits such as individualism and power distance affect the credibility of e-WOM, indicating a need for further exploration of cultural contexts in relation to eco-friendly purchasing decisions.

## Gaps in the Literature

Despite the considerable research on e-WOM, several gaps remain that warrant further investigation. Firstly, while many studies confirm the positive impact of e-WOM on consumer trust and purchasing decisions, few have examined the specific contexts of eco-friendly products in depth. For instance, Barbarossa and Pelsmacker (2016) <sup>[25]</sup> discussed antecedents of purchasing eco-friendly products but did not address e-WOM's role in shaping consumer behavior towards these products.

Moreover, there is limited research exploring how different message framing techniques and source characteristics can be optimized to enhance e-WOM effectiveness in promoting eco-friendly products. This gap is evident in the work of Gvili and Levy (2018) <sup>[23]</sup>, which discusses source credibility but does not specifically relate it to eco-friendly products or identify gaps in the literature.

Additionally, the cultural implications of e-WOM in various regions remain under-explored. Quaye and Mensah (2019) <sup>[26]</sup> highlighted the lack of research on e-WOM's effects in specific cultural contexts, suggesting that future studies should delve deeper into how cultural differences affect consumer behavior towards eco-friendly products.

## Methodology

This research utilizes a systematic literature review methodology according to accepted criteria, including PRISMA. A systematic review is a methodical and controlled process that guarantees the incorporation of pertinent research while reducing bias. The technique includes the formulation of research questions, the development of search methods, the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the synthesis of results. The approach aims to provide a thorough analysis of the

influence of electronic word-of-mouth on eco-friendly product purchases, pinpoint essential sustainability-driven consumer behavior, and direct future study and application.

**Search Process**

The methodology employed for this review involved a comprehensive search of academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library and Google Scholar, using a combination of keywords such as "electronic word-of-mouth," "e-WOM," "online reviews," "social media," "eco-friendly products," "green purchasing," "sustainable consumption," and "consumer behavior". The search was further refined by focusing on studies published within the last decade to ensure the relevance and currency of the findings. The

initial search yielded a substantial number of articles, which were then carefully screened based on their titles and abstracts to identify those that directly addressed the research question. Articles were selected for inclusion if they provided empirical evidence, theoretical insights, or conceptual frameworks related to the impact of e-WOM on consumer behavior concerning eco-friendly products.

To refine the results, search filters were applied based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, as outlined below.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the selection of high-quality, relevant studies. These criteria are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters	Conference proceedings, non-peer-reviewed articles, PhD theses, technical papers
Content	Studies examining the relationship between e-WOM and consumer behavior in the context of eco-friendly or green products.	Studies not focused on eco-friendly products.
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2010 and 2023	Published before 2010
Subject Area	e-WOM, consumer behaviour and eco-friendly or green products.	Studies unrelated to e-WOM, consumer behaviour and eco-friendly or green products.

**Data Extraction and Analysis**

The data extraction strategy for this systematic literature review on the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on eco-friendly product purchases involves meticulous steps to ensure the inclusion of relevant, high-quality studies. The process prioritizes transparency, replicability, and consistency.

- 1. Defining Extraction Criteria:** The extraction framework is built around the study’s objectives. Key data points include:
  - Study title, authors, publication year, and journal.
  - Research context and objectives, especially studies on eWOM and eco-friendly products.
  - Methodology, including sample size, data collection methods, and analytical approaches.
  - Outcomes such as the impact of eWOM on trust, purchase behavior, and moderating factors like source credibility, message valence, and platform dynamics.
  - Recommendations and gaps identified in the literature.
- 2. Data Extraction Form:** A standardized form is created to capture data systematically. This form includes fields for bibliographic details, study design, key findings, theoretical frameworks, and practical implications.
- 3. Screening and Selection:** Studies are assessed based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. For inclusion, studies must:
  - Focus on eWOM’s influence on eco-friendly product purchasing decisions.
  - Be peer-reviewed and published between 2010 and 2023.
  - Provide empirical or theoretical insights relevant to consumer behavior and sustainability.

Studies excluded are non-peer-reviewed papers, conference proceedings, and those unrelated to the eco-friendly context.

- 4. Quality Assessment:** The quality of studies is evaluated using criteria like methodological rigor, relevance to research questions, and depth of analysis.
- 5. Extraction Process:** Data is systematically extracted from selected studies using the standardized form. The extracted data is cross-verified by multiple reviewers to ensure accuracy and completeness. Discrepancies are resolved through discussions and consensus.
- 6. Synthesis:** Extracted data is synthesized to identify key themes, gaps, and patterns, focusing on how eWOM shapes consumer behavior and purchase decisions for eco-friendly products.

**Findings**

**Overview of Selected Studies**

The reviewed studies reveal a multilayered relationship between e-WOM and eco-friendly product purchases. Key themes that emerged include:

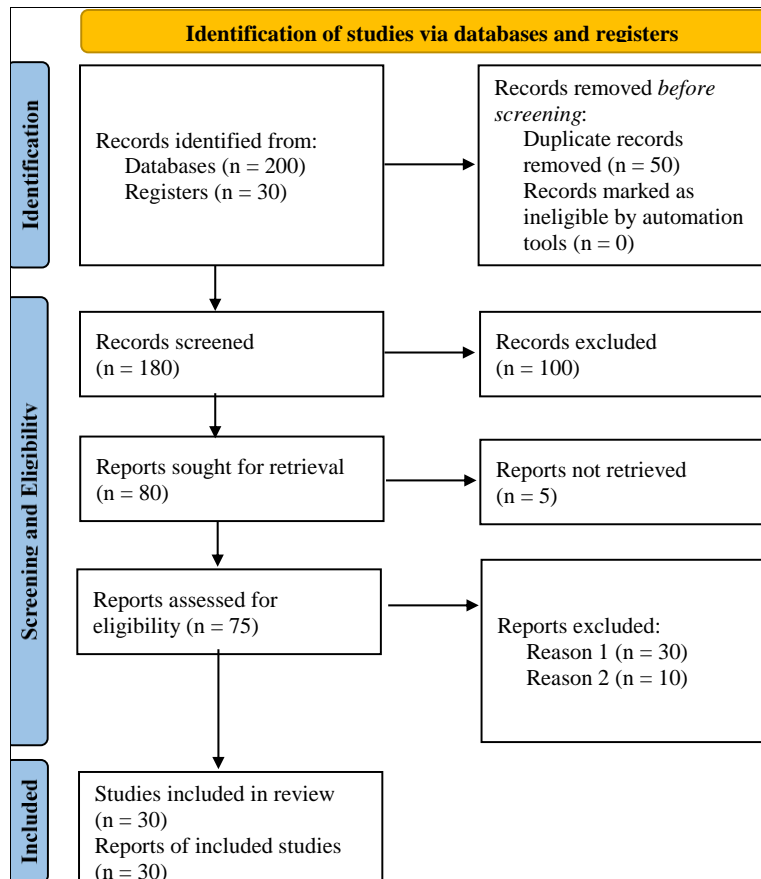
- **Source Credibility:** Several studies report that when e-WOM originates from perceived experts or verified purchasers, its influence on eco-friendly purchases is significantly stronger.
- **Message Valence:** Positive reviews, particularly those expressing satisfaction with the environmental benefits of the product, tend to enhance purchase intentions. Negative reviews, conversely, raise doubts about product authenticity.
- **Platform Dynamics:** Social media platforms and dedicated review sites serve different roles. Social media offers an immediate, shareable form of support for eco-friendly products, while review sites provide detailed evaluations that help to mitigate the risk inherent in green purchases.

**Managerial and Consumer Implications**

For marketing practitioners, the findings suggest tailoring e-WOM strategies to highlight the authenticity and efficacy of eco-friendly products. Encouraging user-generated content and leveraging influencer partnerships can add credibility to

sustainability claims. For consumers, reliable e-WOM acts as a validation tool, mitigating the risk of greenwashing and reinforcing their purchasing decisions rooted in environmental ethics.

**PRISMA Flowchart**



**Fig 1:** PRISMA Flow Diagram

**Table 2:** A summarized table of key findings

Dimension	Impact on Purchase Behavior	Key Moderators
Source Credibility	Increases trust in eco-friendly claims	Expertise, verified user status
Message Valence	Positive messages → Higher purchase intention; Negative messages → Lower trust	Detailed feedback, consistency
Platform Differences	Social media: rapid, broad influence; Review sites: detailed, risk-mitigating	Audience demographics, content format
Cultural Context	Varies by region; collectivist cultures more influenced by peer reviews	Local environmental norms, socio-economic factors

**Discussion**

The synthesis of literature indicates that e-WOM is a critical mediator in the eco-friendly product market. The credibility of online content not only reduces perceived risk but also enhances the emotional commitment of environmentally conscious consumers. The review suggests the following implications:

**Theoretical Implications**

- **Integrating e-WOM with Sustainability Models:** The interplay between e-WOM and eco-friendly product purchases invites the integration of the Elaboration Likelihood Model with sustainability constructs. Future research could develop theoretical frameworks that capture the nuances of green consumer decision-making.

- **Cultural and Contextual Variability:** The review underscores the need to consider cultural influences. Differences in skepticism toward marketing claims across regions necessitate culturally sensitive models.

**Practical Implications**

- **Marketing Strategies:** Companies can harness positive e-WOM by designing campaigns that encourage authentic user reviews and leveraging influencers who are known for their commitment to sustainability.
- **Trust Enhancement:** Since the endorsement of eco-friendly products through digital platforms is highly contingent on perceived authenticity, firms should invest in transparency initiatives—such as third-party certifications—to complement positive e-WOM.

### Future Research Directions

Future research should aim to fill these identified gaps by exploring the following avenues:

#### 1. Contextual Studies on Eco-Friendly Products

Investigating how e-WOM influences consumer behavior specifically in the eco-friendly market across different industries and consumer demographics.

#### 2. Moderating Factors Exploration

A comprehensive analysis of how message valence, source credibility, and platform type interact to influence consumer trust and purchasing decisions for eco-friendly products.

#### 3. Cultural Contexts

Expanding research to include diverse cultural settings to understand better how cultural factors influence the effectiveness of e-WOM in promoting eco-friendly products.

#### 4. Longitudinal Studies

Conducting longitudinal studies to assess how e-WOM impacts consumer behavior over time, particularly as consumer attitudes towards sustainability evolve.

### Conclusion

The systematic literature review reveals that electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) plays a critical role in influencing consumer behavior toward eco-friendly product purchases. This influence stems largely from factors such as source credibility, message valence, platform dynamics, and cultural context. Positive e-WOM, such as satisfied customer reviews and endorsements by trusted influencers, bolsters consumer trust by serving as social proof. Conversely, negative e-WOM has a significant deterrent effect, particularly when it casts doubt on the authenticity of environmental claims. These findings emphasize the power of e-WOM as a mediator in navigating the skepticism surrounding green marketing and sustainability claims.

The role of digital platforms in amplifying e-WOM cannot be overstated. Social media platforms, with their immediate reach and shareability, provide a fertile ground for real-time consumer engagement with eco-friendly brands. Meanwhile, dedicated review sites and forums offer detailed, credible evaluations, serving as a critical risk-mitigation tool for environmentally conscious buyers. Notably, the review highlights variations in how e-WOM is interpreted and acted upon across different cultural and regional settings. Collectivist cultures, for instance, tend to place greater value on peer reviews and community opinions compared to individualistic societies.

For marketers, these insights underscore the importance of fostering genuine and transparent e-WOM strategies to enhance their credibility and resonance with eco-conscious audiences. Encouraging authentic user-generated content, leveraging partnerships with influencers committed to sustainability, and ensuring third-party verifications can significantly strengthen the impact of e-WOM. As the consumer landscape becomes increasingly digital and environmentally aware, these strategies will be pivotal for businesses aiming to maintain relevance and trust.

Future research could further explore the integration of emerging technologies like AI and blockchain in e-WOM to enhance credibility and transparency. Additionally, longitudinal studies could offer insights into the lasting

impacts of e-WOM on consumer loyalty and sustainable consumption practices.

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