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Abstract: Social commerce is a subset of electronic commerce that has quickly emerged as a new area of inquiry for practitioners and researchers. Social media provides a platform for individuals to share their experience and knowledge about the product and services with their friends and relatives, which is commonly called electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Businesses are taking advantage of social commerce and e-WOM to influence and reach the vast customer base. However, there are various factors that these businesses need to consider which affects consumers' decision. The present research is an effort to identify the important e-WOM engagement factors and to investigate their relationship with users' purchase intention through social commerce. An empirical study is conducted by administering a structured questionnaire to 958 respondents from three major states of North India, i.e., Chandigarh (UT), Punjab, and Haryana. The structural equation modelling method is applied to analyse the data. It is found in the study that four factors, i.e., information credibility, attitude towards e-WOM, rapport, and positive reviews have a significant association with e-WOM engagement, which ultimately have bearing on the user's purchase intention through social commerce.

Keywords: social commerce; e-WOM; e-WOM engagement; social networking sites; SNSs; social media; internet; e-commerce; online shopping; e-retailing; online marketing; e-marketing.

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1 Introduction

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) is the new normal for shopping in today's era. The global e-commerce market was estimated to be worth USD 9.09 trillion, and from 2020 to 2027, it is anticipated to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.7% (Grand View Research, 2020). The e-retail market is poised to reach close to 300–350 million consumers by 2025 with a Gross Merchandise Value of 120 billion after the COVID-19 pandemic (*Economic Times*, 2020). With the exponential growth of e-commerce, social commerce is also gaining momentum. Social commerce uses social networking websites as a vehicle to promote products and services. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is the buzz word in advertising and marketing world which has changed the landscape of online marketing. E-WOM can be defined as the usage of internet-enabled technology to communicate to customers about the characteristics or usage of specific goods and services offered by businesses or sellers (Rani et al., 2022). E-WOM is defined as interpersonal communication via digital platforms with the aim of creating a buzz regarding a product, service, brand or entity via recommendations, product ratings and reviews online. With the emergence of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, consumers are getting more and more involved in brand-related e-WOM which is influencing their purchase decisions (Chu and Sung, 2015). As per the studies e-WOM campaigns run by the companies can amplify the positive effect on online purchase intention of consumers (Roy et al., 2018). E-WOM is one of the most reliable sources of information as it seems to be directly coming from the existing customers and users of the brand. It has been emphasised in many studies that word of mouth (WOM) communication has prominent influence on consumer behaviour, including suggestions and recommendations from friends, families and fellow consumers and personal advice (Rani et al., 2022; Nam et al., 2020). With the penetration of the internet e-WOM has more reachability than traditional WOM.

E-WOM gives a consumer psychological stimulation to make his purchase decision, as people like to share, comment, and be connected. Use of e-WOM is primarily driven by three factors (Cheung and Lee, 2012). First of all, customers enjoy telling others about their great interactions with the goods. Secondly, the customer wants to change how the brand is perceived. Lastly, the consumer feels a sense of belonging to the product (Cheung and Lee, 2012). However, the process of decision-making via e-WOM is becoming more and more complex due to information overload on online platforms. The degree to which a person trusts what the public thinks varies from product to product (Hu, 2015). For instance, on Twitter people find reviews from family and friends more reliable while statements from legislators and government officials are considered to be least trustworthy. There is a strong coefficient of relationship between e-WOM credibility and brand image. Likewise positive and strong brand image play a vital role in purchase intention of customers (Siddiqui et al., 2021). It is found in some studies that negative WOM spread faster and has a more adverse impact as compared to positive WOM (Aggarwal et al., 2012). Various studies also show that the valence of e-WOM have a positive impact on the purchase decision of customers (Hamby et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2009; Bigne et al., 2016). The importance and relevance of e-WOM valence depends on nature and contextual usage of product. The experience product has significant effect on the relationship between purchase intention and valence as compared to search product. The quantity of e-WOM messages has a significant impact on a customer's buying intention and decision-making (He and Bond, 2015; Flanagin et al., 2014). Apart from

the message, website service quality also plays a pivotal role in the stimulation of online purchase (Tandon et al., 2017). Additionally, the quantity of e-WOM messages has a significant impact on a customer's buying intention and decision-making (He and Bond, 2015; Flanagan, et al., 2014). Purchase intention was defined by Shah et al. (2012) as the tendency of customers to purchase a specific product in a particular circumstance. It is a complex process, which is generally associated with the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviour of consumers (Kour and Kaur, 2020). Therefore, businesses must identify the characteristics that influence potential customers' purchase intentions during the online search phase to influence those consumers to make the actual purchase. There is abundance of research related to factors influencing purchase intention of brick and mortar customers as well as online customers. E-WOM is the latest topic of interest in the research community and limited studies are done in this area. Literature review has revealed that there is no such prominent study which can fully explain the factors of e-WOM engagement. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap by identifying the e-WOM engagement factors that shape the purchase intention of customers. Considering the significance of e-WOM in social commerce and scant research around this topic, this research will be of high relevance to researchers and marketers. This study also aims to identify the relationship of e-WOM engagement factors with users' purchase intention through social commerce. The results of this study will help marketers to devise suitable marketing strategies on social media to get maximum customer engagement and increase sales by making use of appropriate e-WOM tactics.

2 Literature review

In the following subsections, literature related to some important factors influencing e-WOM engagement is discussed.

2.1 Information credibility

Information credibility (IC) is the key factor in a person's influence process, and it is unquestionably considered to be a reliable source (Wathen and Burkell, 2002). The information received from highly reliable sources of information is valued and encourages the dissemination of information. It also serves as the basis for personal persuasion (Erkan and Evans, 2016). The credibility of the author has an impact on how useful e-WOM communication is viewed as a whole. When there is a high level of trust, the source is seen as reliable, knowledgeable, and credible by the reader or recipient (Al-Haidari and Coughlan, 2014; Daowd et al., 2020). Prior studies have discovered a favourable association between customer purchase intent and information believability, particularly when they perceive it as important and flexible. IC serves as the primary influencing factor in customers' decisions (Prendergast et al., 2010; Park et al., 2007; Hui, 2017; Torres et al., 2018). Thus, the following is hypothesised.

- H1 IC is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influences the user's purchase intention.

2.2 Positive review

The valence of e-WOM communications varies (positive vs. negative information). Positive reviews (PRs) are more likely to contain enticing, dramatic, and glamorised explanations of goods or services, whereas negative e-WOM interactions typically contain negative feedback and nasty descriptions (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Prior research looked into the relationship between the valence of e-WOM and a desire to buy (Jones et al., 2009; Lee and Youn, 2009; Ladhari and Michaud, 2015; Hamby et al., 2015; Bigne et al., 2016). According to prior studies, highly excellent opinions are seen as more reliable and helpful than low first-class ones (Park and Kim, 2008; Guo et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2012; Tsao and Hsieh, 2015). Online PRs are established as an persuasive e-WOM in retailing, it is believed by researchers that on social networking platforms social e-WOM plays a vital role (Kautish and Khare, 2022). Numerous research has revealed that the quality of the argument unquestionably stimulates purchase intention (Liu and Zhou, 2012; Zhang et al., 2014; Furner et al., 2014; Tsao and Hsieh, 2015). For instance, Tsao and Hsieh (2015) in a survey discovered that the quality of the argument favourably influenced the inclination to buy antivirus software and smartphones. Wang et al. (2015) found that PR has more impact on customer attitude towards E-WOM than neutral or negative. In addition, PRs on Facebook affect consumers' brand attitude and purchase intentions (Iqbal et al., 2020). Thus, the following is hypothesised:

H2 PR is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influences user's Purchase Intention.

2.3 Rapport

Rapport (RT) is defined as the degree of closeness the e-WOM receivers feel about the lifestyle and interest, with the e-WOM creators (Fan and Miao, 2012; Pham, 2016). Natural strong connections is the reason behind the instinct of people to trust in recommendation and opinion from relatives and friends as compared to strangers (Bansal and Voyer, 2000; Pham, 2016). RT does not only mean connection between relatives or friend but also encompasses people who have shared lifestyle and interest (Smith et al., 2005). People tend to have more trust in e-WOM if it is from friends, relatives or people with whom they have RT (Fan and Miao, 2012; Sweeney et al., 2008). It was reported by Pham (2016) that RT is a significant factor of e-WOM and have linkage with purchase intention. Thus, the following is hypothesised

H3 RT is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influence the user's purchase intention

2.4 Website quality

Cyberspace atmospherics mental model (CAMM) was advocated by Falk et al. (2005) by discussing the concept of retail atmospherics application to the virtual world in terms of website plan to facilitate design decisions for customers (Kautish and Rai, 2019). Online purchase intentions of customers are linked to service attributes of websites like transaction service, sensory experience, convenience, merchandise and previous online purchase experience (Ranjan and Acharyulu, 2022; Shim et al., 2001). The

accessibility-diagnostic paradigm states that information is viewed as more diagnostic, hence more likely to be employed in the decision-making process, if it is clear and useful for customers in aiding them in categorising and interpreting products (Feldman and Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991). The various mechanisms that make up a website's quality are its relevancy, correctness, completeness, and timeliness (Luo et al., 2014; Tsao and Hsieh, 2015). It was explained by Lee and Lin (2005) that the customer satisfaction and service quality of online customers is affected by the responsiveness, trust, reliability, and website design. Surfing experience and web browsing in online shopping can be pleasing as it offers positive feelings, pleasures and fun to the senses, hedonic values in addition to utility of website, and functional features to customers like sequentially and logical catalogues, shopping efficiency, etc. (Novak et al., 2000; Kautish and Rai, 2019). Thus, the following is hypothesised:

- H4 Website quality (WQ) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influences user's purchase intention.

2.5 *Innovation*

Wide internet coverage and rapid social media usage have changed contemporary modern WOM by embedding it in online discussion forums, blogs, wikis, and recommendation sites; transforming it into e-WOM (Mishra and Satish, 2016). This technological advancement gives fresh opportunities for interpersonal interaction (Gvili and Levy, 2016). It is now possible to deliver information in various formats, such as manuscripts, images, videotape, or computer graphics, thanks to new digital channels (such as social networking sites, blogs, review sites, email comment boards, etc.) e-WOM management must be incorporated into a digital media plan as a critical component of user-generated content (Kim et al., 2015). Thus, the following is hypothesised:

- H5 Innovativeness (INN) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influence user's purchase intention

2.6 *Perceived product popularity*

When consumers accept information from others as proof of truth like proof of the true qualities of a product as believed by others then it can be said that informational influence occurs. When consumers get influenced by the expectations of any group or other person then normative influence occurs (Park and Lee, 2008). In previous research related to social influence on consumer behaviour, it was found that individuals tended to adhere to group opinions as normative pressures were operative in group/public settings (Venkatesan, 1996; Park and Lee, 2008). Purchase intention is influenced by both informativeness and perceived popularity (Park and Lee, 2008). Popularity factor has been used by marketers for a long time as a tried and tested factor (Payne et al., 1991). Rindfleisch and Inman (1998) discussed the hypothesis of social desirability and suggested that the perceived popularity of a target positively influences overall evaluation, money allocation, future purchase intent, and brand choice. Thus, the following is hypothesised:

- H6 Perceived product popularity (PPP) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influences user's purchase intention.

2.7 Attitude towards e-WOM

Some studies discovered how people interact with websites and how it intentionally influences their inclination to make purchases (Lee, 2011; Chih et al., 2013). Lee (2011) discovered through surveys of 104 respondents from Hong Kong that a positive attitude about online shopping websites has a beneficial impact on the intention to buy products. The connection between attitude and purchase intention has been studied by marketing and psychology researchers, and it is also emphasised in the literature on e-WOM (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Hamouda and Tabbane, 2013). Zouabi and Kammoun (2016) elucidated how the e-WOM affected customer attitudes in the agri-food sector and verified the importance of attitudes as a precondition for purchase intention. Other researchers contend that meditative content of e-WOM affects internet users' attitudes and intentions to make purchases (Xiaofen and Yiling, 2009). Thus, the subsequent is hypothesised:

H7 Attitude towards e-WOM is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influence the user's purchase intention

2.8 Purchase intention

The conduct that drives a person to perform a behavior is called intention (Rezvani et al., 2012). What a customer intends to buy is what they believe they will buy. It can also be described as a physical act of purchasing something or as a movement in that direction (Lin and Lu, 2010). Ajzen (1991) suggested that intentions are thought to be an indicator of how much people are willing to practice good behaviour and how many attempts they are making to engage in such behaviour. According to the principles of reasoned action and planned behaviour, this intention depends on the person's or client's successful mindset toward engaging in that behaviour (Lim et al., 2016). The purchase intention variable is one of the most important and well-known elements of e-WOM communication (Lee and Lee, 2009; Sher and Lee, 2009). The volume of both positive and negative online customer reviews influences how favourable or unfavourable customers see a brand (Lee et al., 2008). The recommendations of other customers are undeniably related to their intentions to make purchases and directly affect those decisions (Chang and Chin, 2010). Customer feedback, comments, and reviews are incredibly important to internet marketers. Both online quality and online quantity were discovered to have a favourable impact on customers' intentions to make purchases (Do-Hyung et al., 2007). Thus, the subsequent is hypothesised:

H8 Attitude towards e-WOM has a positive and direct influence on purchase intention through social commerce.

2.9 e-WOM engagement (E-WOME)

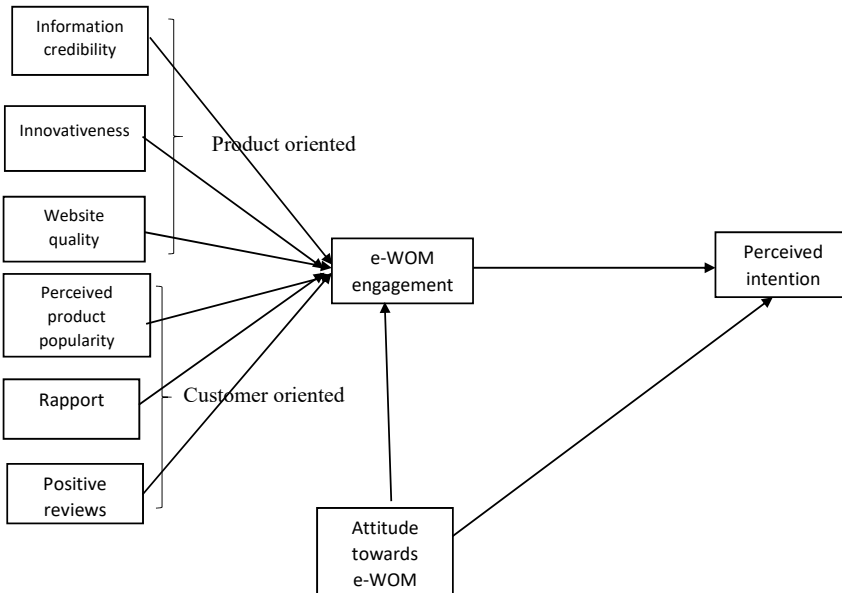
WOM's significance has long been discussed, which is fantastic for people like business owners, academics, and practitioners. WOM, whether traditional or online, has been found to play a significant part in influencing customers' purchasing decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Richins and Root-Shaffer, 1988). Because the client participates in the debate about market statistics, it plays a crucial role in improving customers' attitudes toward the business or behaviours. Due to the information deluge,

they encounter during the product discovery time, consumers prefer to trust and believe in e-WOM more than marketer-generated content (Chu and Kim, 2011). The reason for this is that, in contrast to marketer-generated material from the company enterprise, e-WOM is started and launched by leveraging the consumers' perspective, showcasing the true experience that they have had with the goods and services (Feick and Price, 1987). As a result, when customers look for information to support their purchasing decision, they frequently rely on e-WOM. Therefore, clients often depend on WOM once they search for data to justify their purchase selection. Thus, it is far hypothesised that:

H9 e-WOM engagement has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention through social commerce.

Based on the hypothesis development conceptual model of study as shown in Figure 1 is adopted for this study. The identified factors on basis of review of literature are divided into two main categories, i.e., product oriented and customer oriented. IC, INN, and WQ factors pertain to product characteristics and hence are added in the category of product oriented factors, whereas the factors PPP, RT, and PRs pertain to customer perception and hence are added in the category of customer oriented.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



3 Methods

3.1 Sampling

The sample of the study consisted of 958 respondents from three major states of North India i.e., Chandigarh (UT), Punjab, and Haryana. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from the respondents who were active users of social media and the average

age of respondents was between 18–40 years. Data was collected by sending Google form links via emails, Instagram chats and whatsapp.

3.2 Research instrument

The survey was conducted by administering a semi-structured questionnaire. The self-administered questionnaire was comprised of two sections, the first section consisted of demographic questions and the second section consisted of questions about e-WOM engagement and identified factors. The second section consisted of 32 items on a five-point Likert scale including four items to measure e-WOM engagement, three items to measure IC, and three items to measure attitude towards e-WOM. The research instrument used in the present study include the statements taken from various studies like Park et al. (2007), Prendergast et al. (2010), Chu and Kim (2011) and Coyle and Thorson (2001). The research instrument was checked for its precision, correctness, accuracy, and efficacy before it was used for the implementation of the study. A pilot study was conducted on 100 respondents for testing the reliability of the questionnaire before collecting the data according to the sample plan.

3.3 Statistical technique

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the underlying structure of variables. EFA is one of the commonly used multivariate statistical method which is used to detect the minimum number of hypothetical constructs (also referred to as internal attributes, synthetic variables, latent variables, dimensions, or factors) that can sparingly elucidate the covariation detected among a set of measured variables (also referred to as surface attributes, reflective indicators, effect indicators, manifest variables, or observed variables) (Watkins, 2018). The main purpose is to find the common factors that explain the structure and order between measured variables. The seven factors (IC, attitude towards e-WOM, RT, PRs, WQ, INN, and PPP) were extracted as e-WOM engagement factors that might affect the users' purchase intention through social commerce. After identifying e-WOM engagement factors the next step is to do a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to confirm factors. CFA gives vital evidence about the fit of data to the specific, theory-derived measurement, and highlight the potential weakness of specific items. CFA is a comprehensive process involving model conceptualisation, identification, and parameter estimation, to data-model fit assessment and potential model modification (Mueller and Hancock, 2001). The purpose of doing CFA was to verify the measurement quality of latent constructs used in SEM. In this study, CFA was done by using structural equation modelling (SEM). One of the merits of using SEM to do CFA is that biases of less validly and reliably measured indicators are taken into account by its structural parameters linking the latent constructs, if the SEM model is true.

4 Results

4.1 Reliability analysis

By applying Cronbach's alpha method, the reliability of the factors was checked. The values of Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all seven variables and dependent variables

were more than 0.8 (Table 1), which is within the prescribed limits as given by Hair et al. (2010) and indicates good reliability of the factors.

Table 1 Reliability results

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha value</i>
Information credibility (IC)	0.849
Positive review (PR)	0.865
Rapport (RT)	0.909
Website quality (WQ)	0.899
Innovativeness (INN)	0.886
Perceived product popularity (PPP)	0.883
Attitude towards W-WOM	0.942
e-WOM engagement (EWOME)	0.874
Perceived Intention (PI)	0.932

4.2 *Exploratory factor analysis*

EFA was applied using SPSS software to generate the relevant factors using the principal component analysis method. Nine factors were computed based on variables that had an Eigen value of 1 or more. Factor loadings of 0.5 or more were considered to identify the factors as suggested by Teo (2001) and Hair et al. (2006).

Table 2 KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity results

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.748
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	27,587.449
	Df	496
	Sig.	0.000

The KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity results were calculated using EFA (Table 2) and it was found that the KMO value of the data set was 0.748, which indicates that the sample size is adequate for getting reliable and valid results. The Bartlett's test of sphericity results calculated the chi-square and degree for freedom at a significant level $p < 0.001$. These results depicted no case of multicollinearity in the data (Field, 2009).

Furthermore, rotated factor analysis matrix extracted nine factors with a total variance of 81.429. All the statements under these factors were having factor loading and communalities value above 0.5 (Table 3). The reliability and validity of the data set were confirmed using EFA which creates a reliable base for conducting further analysis of the data.

4.3 *Structural equation modelling*

SEM is developed in two parts, i.e., first, the CFA is developed to verify the extracted factors' validity and goodness of fit for model validation. Secondly, structural model is developed to study the relationship between the variables as defined by the study. Therefore, in the study, the first measurement model is developed and its indices are checked and then the hypotheses are tested using structural model.

Table 3 Factor loadings, communalities, and Cronbach's alpha results

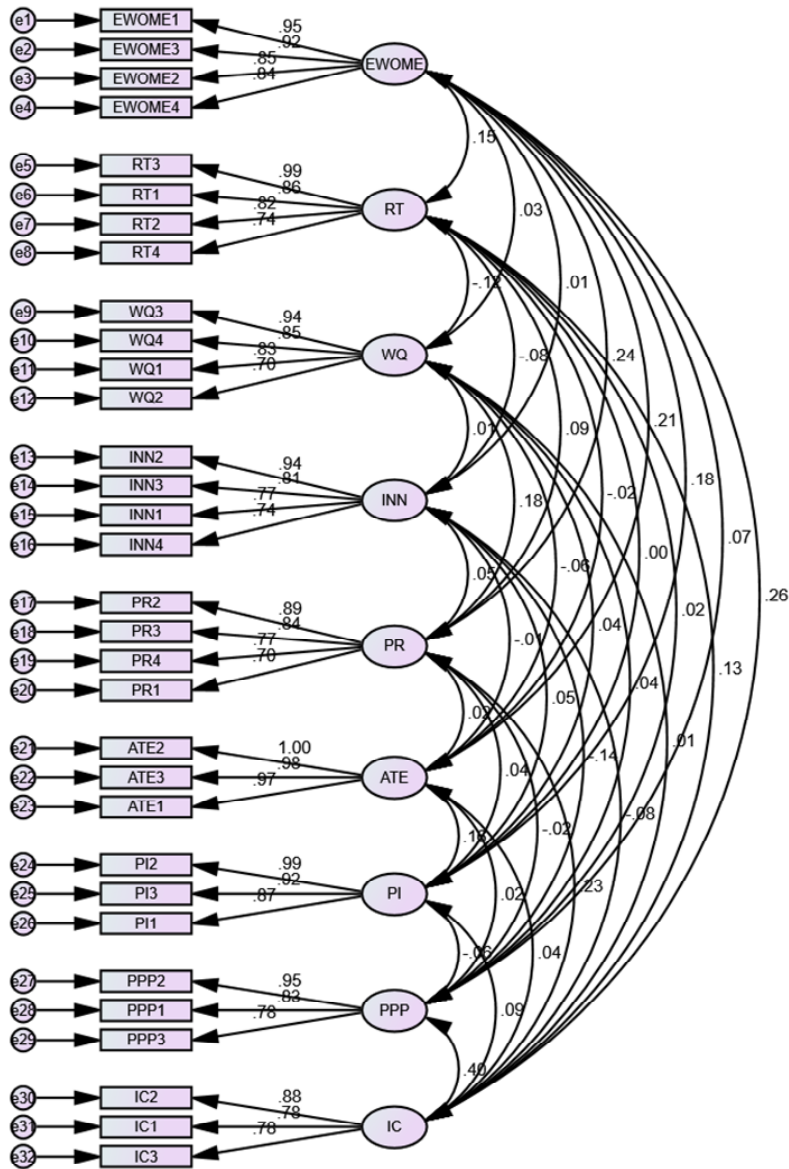
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Factor name</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>Communalities</i>
1	E-WOM engagement (EWOME)	EWOME1	0.928	0.901
		EWOME3	0.913	0.817
		EWOME2	0.885	0.880
		EWOME4	0.874	0.801
2	Rapport (RT)	RT3	0.955	0.830
		RT1	0.899	0.758
		RT2	0.856	0.924
		RT4	0.816	0.687
3	Website quality (WQ)	WQ3	0.924	0.761
		WQ4	0.893	0.641
		WQ1	0.868	0.867
		WQ2	0.793	0.814
4	Innovation (INN)	INN2	0.920	0.723
		INN3	0.870	0.863
		INN1	0.840	0.769
		INN4	0.812	0.674
5	Positive review (PR)	PR2	0.883	0.636
		PR3	0.870	0.811
		PR4	0.835	0.774
		PR1	0.775	0.719
6	Attitude towards e-WOM (ATE)	ATE2	0.984	0.966
		ATE3	0.980	0.987
		ATE1	0.973	0.978
7	Purchase intention (PI)	PI2	0.964	0.871
		PI3	0.938	0.947
		PI1	0.926	0.903
8	Perceived product popularity (PPP)	PPP2	0.925	0.791
		PPP1	0.853	0.887
		PPP3	0.852	0.764
9	Information credibility (IC)	IC2	0.875	0.749
		IC1	0.831	0.825
		IC3	0.815	0.738

4.3.1 Measurement model

A measurement model of the factors is developed using the SPSS AMOS software. It helps in measuring the factor reliability and validity for further analysis. The model fit is calculated using goodness of fit indices, i.e., absolute fit Indices, absolute badness of fit indices, and incremental fit indices. All the values of the model were found to be within

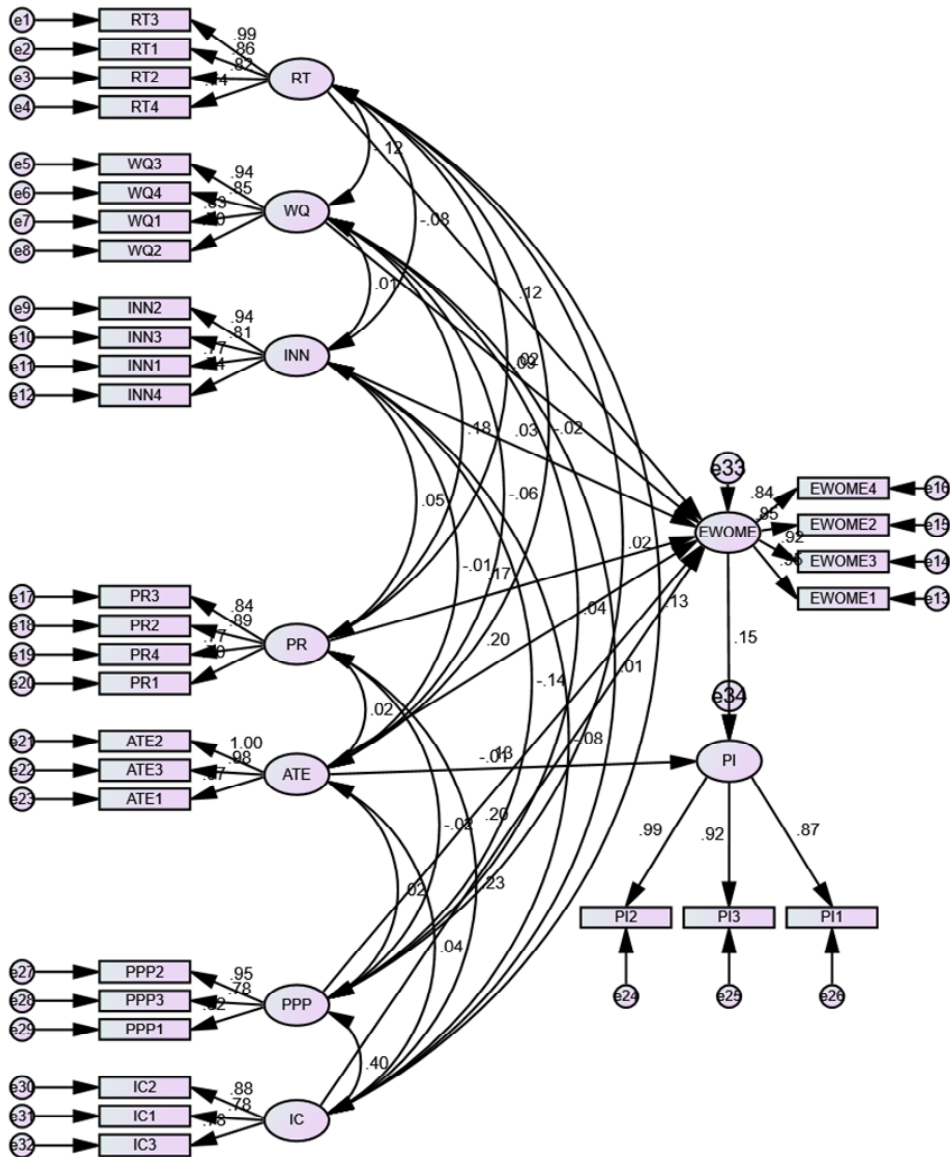
the suggested range as prescribed by Hair et al. (2010). The convergent and discriminant validity of the data was also verified through the measurement model (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Measurement model (see online version for colours)



4.3.2 Structural model

The structural model was developed to identify the e-WOM engagement variables which influence purchase intention through S-commerce (Figure 3). For this purpose, the factors confirmed in the CFA were considered.

Figure 3 Structural model (see online version for colours)

The structural model was found to have significance with a p-value > 0.05 of chi-square (Table 4) which represents a reliable model for interpretation. The CMIN/DF value of the model was found to be under the upper limit of 3 as prescribed by Hair et al. (2010) was at 2.812. The goodness of fit results was also found to be within the suggested limits. GFI was calculated at 0.917. RMR and RMSEA values were also under the given range of 0.042 and 0.061 which shows controlled absolute badness of fit results. CFI (0.957), NFI (0.910), and TLI (0.913) were found to have values more than the suggested limits as given by Hair et al. (2010) (Table 4).

Table 4 Model fit indices of structural model

<i>Model fit indices</i>	<i>Recommended criterion (Hair et al., 2010)</i>	<i>Measurement model</i>
<i>Absolute goodness of fit</i>		
Chi-Square	-	2,515.061
Probability	p-value > 0.05	0.000
CMIN/DF	< 3	2.812
GFI	> 0.9	0.917
<i>Absolute badness of fit</i>		
Root mean residual (RMR)	0.03–0.08	0.042
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.03–0.08	0.061
<i>Incremental fit measure</i>		
CFI	> 0.95	0.957
NFI	> 0.90	0.910
TLI	> 0.90	0.913

4.3.3 Hypotheses testing results

There were seven independent or exogenous variables, i.e., IC, PR, RT, WQ, INN, PPP, and attitude towards e-WOM (ATE) and dependent or endogenous variables, i.e., e-WOM engagement and purchase intention. The SEM analysis results show both standardised and unstandardised estimates but for the current research purpose, only standardised estimates were considered because, with unstandardised weights, it is difficult to estimate the regression weights and beta coefficients for controlled variables. The relationship testing of the model is interpreted by checking the hypotheses developed in the paper. Table 5 represents the relationship tested, their coefficient values, and p-value, based on which the hypotheses were accepted or rejected.

Table 5 represents the results of hypotheses testing conducted using SEM analysis. The results show that out of nine hypotheses, six hypotheses were accepted as they had a significant relationship with the p-value < 0.01 or below but three hypotheses were rejected as they were insignificant. The IC (β value= 0.328 and $p < 0.01$) and PR (β value= 0.198 and $p < 0.01$) were found to be positively significant factors that influence e-WOM engagement which leads to User purchase intention through social commerce.

Among the other factors which were taken into consideration, RT (β value= 0.152 and $p < 0.01$) and attitude towards e-WOM (β value = 0.131 and $p < 0.01$) also had a positive significant influence that influences e-WOM engagement which leads to user purchase intention through social commerce.

Three factors were found to have insignificant influence on e-WOM engagement. These were INN, PPP, and WQ. These factors have a significant value of above 0.05, which shows that they were not significant for the e-WOM engagement influencing Purchase intention.

It was also observed that attitude towards e-WOM (β value= 0.072 and $p < 0.01$) has a positive and direct influence on the purchase intention through social commerce.

E-WOM engagement (β value = 0.134 and $p < 0.01$) also has a significantly positive influence on purchase intention through social commerce.

So, based on the results generated using SEM analysis hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H7, H8, and H9, were accepted and hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 were rejected.

Table 5 Hypotheses testing results of structural model

<i>Hypothesis name</i>	<i>Hypothesis statement</i>	<i>Path coefficient</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>
H1	Information credibility (IC) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influences the user's purchase intention.	0.328	***	Accepted
H2	Positive review (PR) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influences user's purchase intention.	0.198	***	Accepted
H3	Rapport (RT) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influence user's purchase intention.	0.152	***	Accepted
H4	Website quality (WQ) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influence user's purchase intention.	0.023	0.519	Rejected
H5	Innovativeness (INN) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influence the user's purchase intention.	0.020	0.420	Rejected
H6	Perceived product popularity (PPP) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influences user's purchase intention.	-0.009	0.803	Rejected
H7	Attitude towards e-WOM (ATE) is a positive and significant factor of e-WOM engagement which influence the user's purchase intention.	0.131	***	Accepted
H8	Attitude toward e-WOM (ATE) has a positive and direct influence on purchase Intention through social commerce.	0.072	***	Accepted
H9	e-WOM engagement has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention through social commerce.	0.134	***	Accepted

Note: ***Denotes significant at 1% significance level.

5 Discussion

The importance of WOM has long been a topic of great interest for entrepreneurs, researchers, and practitioners for many years. Traditional or online WOM has an extensive role in manipulating client purchase selections (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Richins and Root-Shaffer, 1988). E-WOM has become a vital element of Industry 4.0's

marketing environment, the number of consumers sharing and reading about their experiences on the internet is growing (Daowd et al., 2020; Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020). It plays a vital function in improving customers' attitudes closer to the enterprise or behaviours because the client engages in the discussion about the market records.

This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between e-WOM engagement factors and users' purchase intention through social commerce. By using EFA we were able to identify and validate the e-WOM engagement factors that impact users' purchase intention through social commerce. The seven main factors identified are IC, attitude towards e-WOM, RT and PRs, WQ, INN, and PPP. The findings confirm that IC have a significant association with e-WOM engagement, which ultimately have bearing on the user's purchase intention through social commerce. Credibility in e-WOM is the extent a review or recommendation is perceived to be a true and honest opinion by customers. IC was found to be an important factor of e-WOM which has a significant association with the users' purchase intention. It means that if people believe that true and honest opinions are available on different online platforms, they tend to base their purchase decision on it. In previous studies also credibility is found to be having a direct effect on attitude toward e-WOM (Gvili and Levy, 2016; Hayes and Carr, 2015). The results are very much in line with past studies that emphasise that the attitude towards e-WOM is a significant factor in determining the purchase intention (Zouabi and Kammoun, 2016; Lee, 2011). Attitude toward new technology and its influence on purchase intention has been established by technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989) which is a commonly quoted model in many studies. Many researchers have also proved that intention toward new technology is a major factor influencing consumers' purchase intention. As e-WOM is a new concept, and adoption of a new concept depends on the attitude of people, and how they perceive it which in turn will have an association with their purchase intention.

The present study acknowledges the relationship between RT and the purchase intention of customers on social media platform. The results are in line with previous studies which emphasised the role of RT in purchase intention in online shopping (Pham, 2016; Fan and Miao, 2012). Consumers tend to look for product reviews on social media to get more insight about the product from actual users of the product and they also search for their peer's comments to get more information about the product (Adjei et al., 2010). People tend to trust those people with whom they feel a strong connection. Furthermore, it is revealed in the study that PRs have positive linkage with the purchase intention of customers on social commerce platform. The results of this study corroborate with findings of Çelik and Topuz (2021) that confirmed that positive e-WOM has positive affect on purchase intention). Good reviews are consequently seen as having more influence on client decision-making. PRs have significant impact on customer attitude towards e-WOM (Wang et al., 2015) as it confirms positive utility of products. Knowing actual performance of the product from actual users confirm the offerings claimed by the advertisers. PRs on social media like Facebook are significant in establishing purchase intentions (Iqbal et al., 2020).

The role of PPP, INN, and WQ in influencing the purchase intention of users is not supported in this study. Although many studies have emphasised on significance of WQ as a vital factor in influencing purchase intention of online customers (Kautish and Rai, 2019; Ranjan and Acharyulu, 2022; Shim et al., 2001), so it raises many questions in researchers mind. Hence, there is need to look at this factor from different dimension and future research can explore this important factor with a new angle.

6 Implications of the study

6.1 Theoretical implications

This study has increased our understanding of e-WOM and e-WOM engagement factors which have an association with the purchase intention of consumers on social media. This research attempts to fill the gap by inquiring about the antecedents of e-WOM and also validating the influence of e-WOM engagement factors on the purchase intention of users. This research adds to the e-WOM engagement factors by highlighting less researched factors like RT and IC. Although few studies are done in the area of credibility of messenger or influencer on social media but credibility of information is very less researched topic in the area of e-WOM. This research has confirmed relationship of IC, PRs, RT and attitude towards e-WOM with e-WOM engagement and purchase intention of consumers on social media laying foundation for future research to work on new interrelationships. This research will contribute significantly to the existing research about e-WOM and social media commerce.

6.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this study have managerial implications also. Marketers can use cues from this study to develop their online marketing strategies. They should attempt to encourage people on social media to give comments on their products/services and provide PRs. This will go a long way in enhancing customer engagement and sales. This study has implications for social media sites also. They get more understanding of how the content and reviews on their platform have bearing on the purchase intention and they can use this information as leverage with companies using their social media platforms. From the manufacturer's perspective, it can also be viewed as an opportunity. The insight into the desires and preferences of the customer is very crucial for the customer relationship management, research and development, and marketing department of the firm. Moreover, this information can be used by firms to improve the shopping experience and the level of customer satisfaction. The customer review section has become an integral part of customer awareness and is also emerging as one of the marketing strategies. Some websites allow customers to rate their services in numerical ratings to give star ratings (Mudambi and Schuff, 2010). Hence, reviews of customers on the online platform have become an integral part of online shopping (Sharma and Kour, 2022). Online customer reviews have a direct influence on customer purchase decisions (Elwalda et al., 2016) and hence are becoming focal points of most marketers.

7 Limitations and future research directions

Although this study offered interesting insights into e-WOM engagement factors and their relationship with purchase intention it has a few limitations. Firstly, this study was confined to three main cities in Northern India. Future studies can be conducted in other parts of the world. Secondly, the age group of respondents in the stage was in the range of 18–40 years. But nowadays individuals in their 40s and 50s are also active on social media sites. Future researchers should include people above 40 years also in their study. Thirdly, this study examined only seven factors of e-WOM engagement in social

commerce, namely, IC, attitude towards e-WOM, RT and PRs, WQ, INN, and PPP. Future studies may consider conducting qualitative studies to solicit other e-WOM engagement factors of social commerce. Lastly, it is observed that while doing comparative analysis, studies have shown e-WOM on online shopping platforms have more credibility among consumers as compared to e-WOM through social media (Iqbal et al., 2022). Future research can focus on this dimension and explore e-WOM engagement factors on online shopping platforms.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

- 1 Name: Mr./Mrs./Ms.
- 2 Gender
 - o Male
 - o Female
- 3 Age:
 - o Below 30 years
 - o 30–35years
 - o 35–40 years
 - o 40–45 years
 - o 55 years and above
- 4 Your education
 - o Student
 - o Under graduate
 - o Graduate
 - o Post-graduate
 - o Others

5 How often do you use social network sites like Instagram, Facebook, etc.?

- o Very frequently
- o Frequently
- o Moderately
- o Less
- o Very less

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following items. Rate your reaction to each statement by choosing a number to the left of each statement where:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

1	I have a strong intention to purchase a product online if the product is recommended by my social network friends.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I choose to accept my friend's product recommendations or product reviews without any hesitation when purchasing goods on the Internet.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I will recommend the product to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I always read them when I buy a product.	1	2	3	4	5
5	They are helpful for my decision making when I buy a product.	1	2	3	4	5
6	They make me confident in purchasing product.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The information shared on website is understandable.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The website is user friendly and the information shared is clear.	1	2	3	4	5
9	The website is credible source of information.	1	2	3	4	5
10	In general, I think the quality of website is high.	1	2	3	4	5
11	The information shared on website is convincing.	1	2	3	4	5
12	The information shared is credible.	1	2	3	4	5
13	The information shared is accurate.	1	2	3	4	5
14	The information I got helped me save my time and efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
15	They gave me highly relevant information for my decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5
16	They gave me very useful information for my decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5
17	The information they gave me was helpful enough to give me an idea of the destination.	1	2	3	4	5
18	The review received from friends and relatives are more reliable.	1	2	3	4	5
19	The interpersonal communication with relevant customer is trustable.	1	2	3	4	5

20	The recommendation received from friends is credible source of information.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I will buy if I believe the reviews and comments, are reliable source.	1	2	3	4	5
22	Social media provides fresh opportunities for interpersonal interaction.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Internet provides platform to deliver information in various formats.	1	2	3	4	5
24	New technology is very user friendly.	1	2	3	4	5
25	Internet source of information is very innovative in nature.	1	2	3	4	5
26	The positive review shared on website is reliable.	1	2	3	4	5
27	The review shared on products creates credible source of information.	1	2	3	4	5
28	I will trust the reviews shared by customers on website.	1	2	3	4	5
29	The reviews provide unbiased comment on the product.	1	2	3	4	5
30	The popularity of product influences the decision the purchase the product.	1	2	3	4	5
31	The popularity of product affects the future purchase indent.	1	2	3	4	5
32	Brand choice is influenced by the product popularity.	1	2	3	4	5
