

Influence of E-WOM on Emotional Purchase Decisions in Ceviche, Fish, and Seafood Restaurants in Chimbote, Perú

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Abstract

The study investigates the influence of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on the emotional purchase decisions of consumers in ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants in Chimbote, Peru. A mixed methodology was employed, combining the collection of quantitative data from 323 surveyed consumers and qualitative data obtained from 30 interviews, aiming to explore how e-WOM affects emotional purchase perceptions and choices in this specific context. The findings reveal a significant correlation between e-WOM and emotional purchase decisions, supported by a Rho value of 0.827 and a regression model that explains 73.9% of the variability in these decisions. Additionally, factors such as convenience, product accessibility, economic factors, and visual stimuli were identified as crucial influences on purchase decisions. In summary, this study contributes not only to the theoretical understanding of e-WOM and consumer behaviour but also offers practical implications for marketing strategies and experience management in this sector.

Keywords: *Consumer behaviour; Electronic Word-of-mouth; Emotional purchasing decisions; Food industry; Public opinion.*

Introduction

In today's digital age, consumer perceptions are increasingly influenced by online opinions and comments, known as e-WOM (electronic Word of Mouth), where this phenomenon has gained significant relevance in purchase decision-making, particularly regarding products and services, as it acts as a form of recommendation that can tip the scales in favour or against a purchase, affecting both the rational and emotional decisions of consumers (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Hancock et al., 2023). Social networks are evolving from simple interaction platforms to becoming integral components of our daily lives, transforming the way we communicate, share information, and make decisions (X. Liu et al., 2024).

The internet has provided a powerful tool for both consumers and entrepreneurs: online comments, which can be positive or negative, have the ability to influence the reputation of companies and, therefore, purchase decisions (Naujoks & Benkenstein, 2020). That is to say, they function as a potent method of complaint or emotional expression, since not only are they known by the customer who expresses dissatisfaction with a product or service, but, by being published on publicly accessible pages, they can reach a large number of people simultaneously (Ahn & Park, 2024). This characteristic amplifies the impact of each comment, turning them into a mass communication tool that influences public perception and company reputation, as well as allowing other consumers to make more informed decisions based on the experiences shared by their peers (Bhandari et al., 2021).

Various international studies have explored the elements that affect e-WOM and emotional purchase decisions (Bang & Jang, 2024). E-WOM constitutes a relevant factor due to its influential characteristics in consumer trust and purchase decision-making (Le-Hoang, 2020). For this reason, multiple investigations

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indicate that positive comments help improve an organisation's reputation and increase purchase intention, whereas negative comments can damage the corporate image if not properly managed (Dixit et al., 2019).

Studying the interaction between e-WOM and emotional purchase decisions is crucial for understanding consumer perception. Analyses show that online comments significantly influence the profitability of restaurants; a positive comment highlighting an optimal experience can attract potential consumers who read that comment, resulting in increased sales. However, few establishments adequately value online comments, with most limiting themselves to reading them without implementing changes that could strengthen their brand and serve as a competitive tactic (Wang et al., 2021; Rasty & Filieri, 2024; Braga et al., 2023; Popy & Bappy, 2022).

Therefore, positive reviews not only increase purchase intention and, consequently, sales, but they can also significantly influence the improvement and development of new products (Indrawati et al., 2023). Similarly, the positivity of comments tends to modify users' perception, highlighting testimonial evaluations as they have a stronger impact on customer attitudes (Shin et al., 2023). Additionally, a percentage of interested parties fully trust online reviews when they are perceived as credible. Consumers adopt the information contained in them, directly influencing their purchase decisions, which underscores the importance of properly managing reviews and encouraging positive comments to increase brand reputation (Mendoza & Moliner, 2022; Anaya et al., 2019).

This fact is reflected in the discovery that the quality and credibility of online comments directly influence consumers' purchase intention (Ma et al., 2022). Detailed and well-written reviews tend to be more persuasive and reliable, reinforcing the idea that not only quantity but also quality in e-WOM is crucial for influencing purchase decisions (Jia, 2020). Likewise, moderating factors have been explored that can affect the effectiveness of e-WOM, finding that prior consumer experience with the product moderates the influence of the review, being more effective for inexperienced consumers seeking guidance (Majó et al., 2018). On the other hand, it was identified that the relevance and context of the comment also play an important role in consumer perception, highlighting that comments from sources perceived as experts or similar to the user have a greater impact (Gelashvili et al., 2024; Nuseir, 2019).

User perception changes according to various cultural contexts, a fact observed in the Asian market, where consumers are more likely to trust e-WOM due to a greater orientation towards collectivity and trust in community opinions (Zi & Ha, 2023). Whereas, in the North American market, they value autonomy more and can be more critical when evaluating the credibility of online comments (H. Liu et al., 2024).

Regarding the influence of e-WOM based on the type of consumer, significant differences are noted according to gender. It is also important to highlight that the perception between men and women varies considerably, as women tend to value the quality and necessity of the information provided more, while men consider the credibility of that information to be more crucial (Sánchez et al., 2018; F. Liu et al., 2017).

The main objective of this research is to analyse the impact of e-WOM on the emotional purchase decisions of consumers in ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants in Chimbote. It is important to consider that online comments, specifically in the restaurant sector, are distinguished by their ability to influence the perception of product quality and safety. Additionally, these comments often reflect sensory and emotional experiences that can be decisive in choosing an establishment.

The port of Chimbote, located in the Ancash region of Peru, is known for its prominent fishing industry, where this environment has fostered the proliferation of numerous restaurants specialising in ceviche, fish, and seafood, attracting both locals and tourists. The marine wealth of the bay has been fundamental to the development of vibrant and varied cuisine, making it an important gastronomic destination characterised by the abundance and freshness of its seafood products that ensure an authentic and memorable culinary experience (Loayza, 2022).

This study contributes to understanding consumer behaviour in the digital age, exploring how online comments can affect purchase decisions from both a rational and emotional perspective. It aims to provide

valuable insights to restaurant managers for designing effective online reputation management strategies, improving customer satisfaction and promoting fair competition. To achieve this, a mixed methodological approach has been adopted, allowing for more comprehensive and in-depth research, contributing to a better understanding of online comments and their impact on emotional purchase decisions. Therefore, this study positions itself as a full effort to elucidate the relationship between e-WOM and emotional purchase decisions in restaurants, fostering a deeper understanding and promoting constant development in the field of consumer behaviour.

Literature Review

e-WOM represents the digitised expression of consumer opinions, recommendations, and experiences about products and services, disseminated through publicly accessible online platforms, where this phenomenon leverages global interconnectedness and the speed of internet communications to amplify and modify perceptions and purchase decisions, being crucial in the digital age, where the influence of personal opinions can have a significant impact on the reputation of brands and organisations (Chuan & Kim, 2018). Similarly, it not only serves as a digital barometer of consumer satisfaction, but also functions as a catalyst for the building of virtual communities that share similar interests and values, where these communities not only exchange opinions about products and services, but also create a space where debates are generated, and specialised knowledge is shared (Handoyo, 2024). In this sense, e-WOM is not limited to the passive promotion of products but can also act as a platform for the co-creation of content and collaborative innovation between consumers and companies (Akbari et al., 2022; Bu et al., 2021).

e-WOM reveals itself as a multifaceted event that goes beyond being simply a channel of digitised feedback, in which its ability to influence perceptions and purchase decisions through the dissemination of consumer opinions and experiences is crucial in the digital age, as it not only reflects a barometer of customer satisfaction but also acts as a driving force for the formation of virtual communities that share similar interests and values. Therefore, understanding and effectively managing e-WOM becomes essential for companies seeking not only to maintain a good digital reputation, but also to foster a deeper and more meaningful connection with their users in an increasingly interconnected and digitalised environment (Akbari et al., 2022; Haro et al., 2022; Verma & Dewani, 2021).

According to Hu & Ha (2015), the four dimensions of eWOM are: specialised eWOM, which refers to customer reviews posted on specialised websites comparing purchases or ratings, such as Yelp and Consumersearch, which do not sell products but provide customer reviews on specific products or of all kinds; affiliated eWOM, which refers to customer reviews on retail websites such as Amazon and eBay, where both products/services and customer reviews are found simultaneously; social eWOM, which encompasses any information related to brands or products exchanged between social media users; and miscellaneous eWOM, which includes relevant information about brands or products in other online media such as discussion forums, emails, and blogs.

Emotional purchase decision refers to the predominant influence of emotions over the consumer's decision-making process when acquiring products or services (Guo et al., 2020). This concept, deeply rooted in consumer psychology, holds that emotions can overcome logic and rationality when choosing a product, where emotions such as happiness, fear, nostalgia, or desire act as powerful catalysts that can drive or inhibit purchase decisions (Garg et al., 2023). In this context, brands and sellers seek to create experiences that resonate emotionally with consumers, using visual elements, narratives, and sensory stimuli that evoke specific emotional responses (Dou et al., 2021). Likewise, the emotional purchase decision not only manifests in the immediate satisfaction of the customer but can also influence long-term loyalty and the overall perception of the brand (Li et al., 2024).

The emotional purchase decision underscores its decisive influence on consumer behaviour, in which this approach reveals that emotions not only guide immediate purchase decisions but also shape long-term perceptions and customer loyalty towards a brand (Alam & Abdul, 2018; Shams et al., 2024). By understanding how emotions shape purchase decisions, establishments can develop more effective and

authentic marketing strategies that go beyond the functional benefits of products and services. This implies designing brand experiences that not only satisfy rational needs but also deeply connect with consumers' feelings and aspirations (Hasani et al., 2023). Thus, the study of emotional purchase decision not only enriches consumer behaviour theory but also provides practical guidance for brands seeking to establish more meaningful and lasting relationships with their audience.

In the social commerce environment, emotional factors play a crucial role. According to Wang & Shahzad (2024), emotional support and relationship quality are key determinants of consumers' purchase intention, where emotional support is manifested in the perception of being cared for and understood by the online community, which generates trust and fosters purchase decisions driven by positive emotions. These social interactions on social commerce platforms increase purchase intention by meeting the emotional needs of consumers, promoting an environment of trust and connection.

Research Methodology

The study in question employs a mixed research methodology of the Dexplis type, which is structured in an initial phase focused on the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by a qualitative stage aimed at identifying additional factors that influence purchase decision-making throughout this process, where the findings of both phases are integrated jointly, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018). This facilitated a more exhaustive analysis of the relationship and influence between e-WOM and the emotional purchase decisions of consumers in ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants in Chimbote, Peru.

Likewise, the research is of an applied nature, as it utilised scientific knowledge about the theory of e-WOM, purchase decision-making, scientific articles, and scientific texts to understand the stated problem. The study adopts a mixed approach, with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design, and a correlational-causal scope. The sample included 323 consumers, who were provided with a questionnaire to assess the influence of e-WOM on emotional purchase decision-making. The variables present four dimensions and ten items each. The reliability of the questionnaire was verified using Cronbach's Alpha, obtaining a value of $\alpha = 0.967$. Subsequently, SPSS 27 software was used to employ the Spearman's Rho test to determine the level of association between the variables. Finally, a multiple linear regression test was used to investigate causal influence, which allowed evaluating the effect of the dependent variable on the independent variable.

In the qualitative analysis, a non-probabilistic sample of 30 people was selected using the intentional sampling technique. In this context, each chosen candidate was personally and arbitrarily evaluated, thus enabling a deliberate selection of users who would provide significant and relevant perspectives for the research (Feehan et al., 2022). These participants were given a structured interview with 15 questions, the results were analysed, and subsequently, the interpretation and illustration of the findings obtained from the research were synthesised.

Results and Discussions

This section delves into both the quantitative and qualitative results obtained in the study. The quantitative analysis focuses on evaluating the influence of e-WOM on the emotional purchase decisions of Peruvian consumers, using statistical techniques such as multiple linear regression to determine the impact of various key predictors. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis explores various factors that influence the purchase decisions of food products, identifying relevant categories and subcategories through the coding of data obtained from interviews and content analysis. This comprehensive approach allows for a deep understanding of how both quantitative and qualitative aspects contribute to the formation of emotional purchase decisions in the specific context of ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants.

In Table 1, to determine the degree of correlation between e-WOM and emotional purchase decision in consumers of ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants, the Spearman's Rho coefficient was employed, allowing for the determination of whether there is a significant association between the variables.

Table 1: Degree of correlation between e-WOM and Emotional Purchase Decision

Criterion	Emotional Purchase Decision		
	Spearman's Rho	df	Sig.
e-WOM	0.827	323	0.000

Source: SPSS V.27

The data shows a very strong positive connection between e-WOM and emotional purchase decision, with a Rho value of 0.827, this indicates that there is a significant and robust relationship between online recommendations and opinions, and the tendency of consumers to make purchase decisions based on emotions.

In Table 2, to analyse the impact of e-WOM on emotional purchase decisions in consumers of ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants, the multiple linear regression model was applied, thus allowing the investigation of how the dimensions of e-WOM significantly influence users' emotional perceptions and purchase choices.

Table 2: Influence between e-WOM and Emotional Purchase Decision

Predictors	F	R ²	B	p
Model 1			6.895	
e-WOM	906.86	0.739	0.857	0.000

Source: SPSS V.27

The regression results indicate that the model is highly significant, as demonstrated by the p-value = 0.000. The R² is 0.739, indicating that 73.9% of the variability in emotional purchase decisions can be explained by the model with e-WOM as a predictor. This implies that the remaining 26.1% of variability is due to other factors.

The obtained regression equation was $6.895 + 0.857 * (\text{e-WOM})$, which, according to the model, for each unit increase in e-WOM, emotional purchase decisions increase by 0.857 units. This result underscores the strong influence between the mentioned variables, demonstrating that online opinions and reviews are a determining factor in consumer purchase behaviour.

In Table 3, to investigate how expert opinions and recommendations impact consumer affect, multiple regression was employed, which allowed for robust and statistically significant determination of the influence of this key factor on emotional purchase decisions.

Table 3: Influence of Specialised e-WOM on Emotional Affect

Predictors	F	R ²	B	p
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Model 2			1.866	
	353.23	0.524		0.000
Specialised e-WOM			0.706	

Source: SPSS V.27

The multiple regression results denote that the predictor is significantly associated with emotional affect. The R^2 value is 0.524, indicating that 52.4% of the change in affect can be explained by the model that includes these predictors, these findings highlight the crucial influence on the positive or negative emotions associated with the product, thus affecting the consumer's willingness to purchase based on their feelings and affections.

The regression equation was $1.866 + 0.706 * (\text{specialised e-WOM})$, where, according to the model, emotional affect in consumers of ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants increases by 0.706 units for each unit increase in expert opinions.

In Table 4, the aim was to examine how interactions and recommendations generated by friends, family, and social networks have the potential to strengthen the consumer's emotional attachment to a product, where multiple regression was used, whose findings are fundamental to understanding consumer perception.

Table 4: *Influence of Social e-WOM on Attachment*

Predictors	F	R ²	B	p
Model 3			1.533	
	228.25	0.416		0.000
Social e-WOM			0.499	

Source: SPSS V.27

The regression analysis reveals that the social dimension has a significant impact on user attachment. The R^2 of 0.416 implies that 41.6% of the variability in attachment is explained by the predictor. These findings underline the importance of how perceptions and relationships with brands are shaped, making recommendations powerful for moulding the perceptions of consumers through what they consume.

The obtained regression equation was $1.533 + 0.499 * (\text{social e-WOM})$, indicating that attachment increases by 0.499 points for each additional unit of social recommendations.

In the context of the qualitative analysis, additional factors that influence purchase decisions in consumers of ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants were explored, resulting in the identification of four categories, six subcategories, and seven codes. This approach enriches the study by providing a deeper understanding of the elements that shape purchase decisions, thus complementing the quantitative results obtained.

Table 5: *Codes, Subcategories and Categories base on Interview Responses*

CODES	SUBCATEGORIES	CATEGORIES
Simple and quick process	Ease of Purchase	Convenience and Accessibility
Availability of nearby restaurants	Product accessibility	
Availability of financial resources	Economic factors	Contextual factors
Searching for deals		
Urgency or immediate need for the product	Temporal factors	
Response to visual stimuli	Emotional triggers	Impulsivity
Exclusive products	Unique and/or new products	Exclusivity

Source: Interview analysis

Category 1: Convenience and Accessibility

Subcategory 1.1: Ease of Purchase

Code 1.1.1: Simple and Quick Process: In the purchasing process, it is revealed that consumers appreciate not only the efficiency of the transaction but also the reduction of uncertainties and frictions that may arise during the buying experience. This convenience not only translates into an immediate positive experience but can also strengthen consumer loyalty towards the establishment. Reinforcing the assertion that a simplified purchasing process can enhance the perception of customer service quality and foster positive word-of-mouth recommendations, thus amplifying the emotional impact on purchase decisions (Woo et al., 2021).

Subcategory 1.2: Product Accessibility

Code 1.2.1: Availability of Nearby Restaurants: This is crucial for consumers, as it not only facilitates the quick satisfaction of their desires but also provides a sense of security and confidence in knowing they can easily access the product whenever they wish. Confirming that the proximity and availability of the restaurant not only improve the customer experience but can also be a key differentiator from the competition (D'Avoglio et al., 2024).

Category 2: Contextual Factors

Subcategory 2.1: Economic Factors

Code 2.1.1: Availability of Financial Resources: This can influence customers' purchasing decisions, where financial capacity not only determines what type of ceviche or accompaniments consumers can choose but also how they value the quality and freshness of the product in relation to their available budget. Users tend to adjust their choices based on their current financial situation and perception of stability (Carter et al., 2023).

Code 2.1.2: Searching for Deals: The search for these aspects reflects the importance that users place on getting good value for their money when choosing which products to consume. This behaviour not only focuses on obtaining lower prices but also on maximising the perceived value of ceviche and other dishes. Consumers see deals as an opportunity to enjoy fresh and quality products at more accessible prices, which significantly influences their purchasing decisions. Supporting this trend, implementing effective discount and promotion strategies can not only improve the perception of cost-benefit but also strengthen customer loyalty to the establishment (Yasri et al., 2020).

Subcategory 2.2: Temporal Factors

Code 2.2.1: Urgency or Immediate Need for the Product: This significantly influences emotional purchasing decisions in food products. Consumers experience situations where the purchase is motivated by an urgent need to satisfy a specific requirement, prioritising the immediate availability of the product over other factors. This need can trigger intense emotional responses, making consumers more susceptible to the influence of real-time marketing (Grisales, 2019).

Category 3: Impulsivity

Subcategory 3.1: Emotional Triggers

Code 3.1.1: Response to Visual Stimuli: Plays an important role in generating emotional responses. The visual presentation of the product can evoke emotions that drive the purchase. Supporting the observation that visual stimuli can activate brain areas associated with emotions and impulsive decision-making (Fang et al., 2021).

Category 4: Exclusivity

Subcategory 4.1: Unique and/or New Products

Code 4.1.1: Exclusive Products: The offering of unique ceviches is a highly attractive factor for customers. The perception of exclusivity in the variety of ceviches can significantly increase their value and attraction to these dishes. Additionally, customers may be drawn to the opportunity to try exclusive gastronomic options that reflect innovation and quality. The perception of exclusivity can not only activate feelings of status and personal satisfaction but also influence customers' willingness to pay a premium price for distinctive experiences (Yao, 2023).

Conclusions

The present study has demonstrated a significant influence of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on the emotional purchase decisions of consumers in ceviche, fish, and seafood restaurants in Chimbote, Peru, revealing that e-WOM plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and emotional choices, highlighting the importance of online opinions and recommendations, indicating that consumers are highly influenced by the experiences shared by others, which affects both their emotions and their purchase decisions, being especially relevant in the context of gastronomy, where emotions play a fundamental role in the choice of an establishment.

The analysis also revealed that 73.9% of the variability in emotional purchase decisions is influenced by e-WOM, demonstrating the powerful impact of online opinions, highlighting the relevance of online reputation management for restaurants, where positive comments not only increase purchase intention and sales but can also significantly influence the improvement and development of new products. On the other hand, negative comments can damage the corporate image if not managed correctly, making it essential for restaurants to implement effective strategies to manage online reviews and foster a culture of positive feedback, where this will not only improve customer perception but also strengthen loyalty towards the establishment.

Additionally, the qualitative analysis identified additional factors such as convenience, product accessibility, economic factors, and visual stimuli, which also play a crucial role in purchase decisions, suggesting that businesses should pay attention not only to online reviews but also to the overall customer experience to foster positive comments.

Finally, this study contributes to understanding consumer behaviour in the digital age, providing valuable insights for restaurant managers on how online opinions affect emotional purchase decisions, where the practical implications of these findings suggest that establishments should focus on offering an exceptional

customer experience and actively encourage the generation of positive e-WOM, which includes implementing marketing strategies that highlight sensory and emotional experiences, as well as the proactive management of online reviews to build and maintain a solid digital reputation.

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