THE INFLUENCE OF E-WOM ON PURCHASE INTENTION THROUGH BRAND IMAGE AND VALUE COCREATION

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DECLARATION

I, hereby declared that the presented work in the thesis entitled "**The Influence of e-WoM on Purchase Intention through Brand Image and Value cocreation**" in fulfilment of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** is outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Lokesh Jasrai working as Associate Professor, in the Mittal School of Business of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of other investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.

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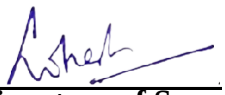
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph. D. thesis entitled "**The Influence of e-WoM on Purchase Intention through Brand Image and Value cocreation**" submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the reward of degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in the Mittal School of Business is a research work carried out by Isha Bakshi is bonafide record of his/her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.



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ABSTRACT

The internet's emergence has fundamentally transformed human communication, transitioning it from physical interactions to virtual exchanges. Social media platforms, a cornerstone of this digital revolution, have redefined how people connect, enabling one-on-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many interactions. With a simple click, individuals can effortlessly share and seek information on diverse topics, ranging from sports and economics to business, stock markets, and product details. Social media not only facilitates global conversations but also empowers users to create their own content. Digital spaces like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter have supplanted conventional media outlets like newspapers, television, radio, and magazines. While some people still read newspapers, they do so via their smartphones. Television, while still widely popular, no longer holds unquestioned authority. Modern viewers rely less on advertisements and more on the authenticity of peer reviews and recommendations. Word-of-mouth, an enduring marketing tool, continues to be influential. Meta owned company Instagram is a widely favored social networking platform across various age groups. Research indicates that users generally spend around 30 minutes on Instagram daily, with a substantial 81% of them utilizing the platform for product and service research (Christina Newberry, 2021). A 2007 survey by Neilson Global Trust highlighted that approximately 80% of consumers place trust in recommendations from fellow consumers. When this interpersonal exchange happens online, through channels like blogs, social networks, review websites and official company pages, it is referred to as electronic word of mouth (e-WoM). Electronic word of mouth encompasses any statement, whether favorable or unfavorable, about goods and services endorsed by both current and prospective customers. These electronic dialogues, originating from genuine consumers, have the power to shape consumer attitudes, both pre- and post-purchase. People express their views on specific brand products and services, ranging from glowing endorsements to critical evaluations based on their personal experiences. Researchers have identified various factors motivating consumers to engage in e-WoM, with perceived risk standing out as a significant influence, especially when dealing with new and technical products.

In the realm of contemporary marketing, the impact of electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) on perception of brand stands as a pivotal area of investigation. Brand image is a multifaceted construct representing consumers' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes

towards a brand (Keller, 1993). It encompasses the associations, attributes, and emotions that consumers associate with a brand. e-WoM has arisen as a fundamental driver of brand image in the digital age. Consumers are gradually relying on e-WoM platforms as valuable wellbeing of information and recommendations related to goods and services (Laroche et al., 2012). These platforms serve as dynamic hubs where individuals share their experiences, opinions, and evaluations of brands and offerings. As consumers navigate the vast landscape of e-WoM, they encounter a myriad of reviews, comments, and recommendations, each contributing to their perception of a brand. The significance of positive e-WoM experiences in shaping brand image cannot be underestimated. When consumers come across favorable e-WoM, it often leads to the development of favorable brand associations (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). These associations encompass a range of attributes, values, and emotions linked to the brand, such as quality, trustworthiness, and satisfaction. Positive e-WoM experiences serve as building blocks for these associations, gradually shaping how consumers view and evaluate the brand. Moreover, the continuous nature of e-WoM interactions in the digital realm contributes to the evolution and enhancement of the brand's image (Dellarocas et al., 2007). Unlike traditional forms of WOM, e-WoM allows for real- time, ongoing conversations between consumers. This dynamic exchange of information and feedback ensures that the brand's image remains dynamic and responsive to consumer sentiments and experiences. Brands that actively engage with and monitor e-WoM can adapt and evolve in real-time, aligning their image with consumer expectations and preferences.

The amalgamation of e-WoM, value co-creation, also purchase intention unveils a profound transformation in the way consumers and brands engage in today's digital landscape. Value co-creation, as introduced by Prahalad and Ramaswamy represents a paradigm shift from the traditional view of companies as sole creators of value. It acknowledges its buyers as engaged contributors in the vcc process. This participatory approach emphasizes collaborative interactions, where consumers and companies work together to generate mutual value. In this digital era, e-WoM acts as a catalyst in this co-creation process. It serves as a conduit for the interchange of information, experiences, and insights among customers and their respective brands. Through e-WoM, consumers can readily express their views, and offer guidance on various goods and services. This dynamic exchange facilitates a deeper level of engagement and collaboration, enabling companies to refine their offerings based on real-time feedback.

Moreover, e-WoM exerts a noteworthy influence on consumer purchase intent. The opinions and experiences shared through e-WoM platforms hold substantial sway in shaping the decision-making process (Smith & Vogt, 1995). Consumers invest a significant level of trust in the recommendations and insights of their peers. Positive e-WoM can instill confidence in potential buyers and tip the scales in favor of a specific goods. Understanding this intricate interplay is paramount for modern marketers. By actively engaging with consumers through e-WoM and leveraging their insights, companies can co-create value that resonates with their target audience (Cova, 2008). This collaborative approach not only fosters stronger consumer- brand relationships but also catalyzes the creation of products and services that aligns closely with customer requirements and preferences.

Several existing studies on e-WoM have provided valuable insights into general consumer behavior. However, there is a noticeable gap in the existing literature regarding how e-WoM specifically influences consumer behavior within specialized markets, such as the smartphone industry. Nevertheless, a research void exists in delving into mediating factors like brand image and value co-creation, both of which might have an essential role in shaping consumer responses to e-WoM. This research endeavors to examine the influence that electronic word of mouth exerts on consumers' intent to purchase on social platforms, such as Instagram. Additionally, the study explores the mediating roles of brand image and value co-creation in this context.

In this study, participants were carefully selected from prominent smartphone brands. Specifically, focusing on individuals who were actively engaged in e-WoM on Instagram prior to making their purchase decisions. Data was collected from 800 respondents who were using Instagram as a platform for e-WoM. The findings of the study were scrutinized by employing structural equation modelling technique. SMART PLS (4.3) was employed to execute the Structural Equation Model. As this robust software tool empowers researchers to perform structural equation modeling and analyze the relationships between latent variables effectively.

Findings of our research underscores the substantial influence of electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) on consumers’ intent to purchase. Active participation in online discussions, reviews, and recommendations significantly enhances consumers' tendency to purchase smartphones of a particular brand. Additionally, our study establishes a robust and statistically substantial association between e-WoM and brand image. This highlights the profound influence of online conversations, reviews, and

recommendations on consumers' perceptions of a brand. It further solidifies the understanding that the digital realm plays a crucial role in shaping how consumers interpret and engage with brands. Further the study also confirms a positive and substantial correlation between electronic word of mouth, Value Co-Creation with Purchase Intention. This implies that consumers actively participating in online discussions and contributing to value co-creation are more inclined to intend to make a purchase.

These findings carry significant implications for businesses aiming to strengthen their brand-consumer relationships and boost their intention to purchase. Acknowledging the essential significance of e-WoM is vital for businesses looking to thrive in the digital landscape. The outcomes of the study bear noteworthy repercussions for companies, urging them to cultivate online communities, create avenues for consumer engagement, and recognize and appreciate consumer input.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Technology has revolutionized the lifestyle of people. Now we reside in a period where within a mere gesture on smartphone or laptop we can apply for jobs (Indeed.com) acquire items from the tranquility of our homes (Amazon.com), indulge in culinary delights (Zomato.com), all while bestowed gifts upon our loved ones on important occasions even if our leave isn't approved at work. Not only that, technology has transformed the way communication used to occur. Various social media platforms have empowered people to socialize without any geographical barriers. Due to hectic lifestyle people opt for connecting through various social media platforms rather than engaging in personal visits. This shift has enabled to form both personal and business relationships. New media communication includes emails, blogs, and social networking sites. Beyond connecting with others on social media its users also share their opinions, thoughts, acquire knowledge, and obtain information about world affairs, new songs/products/movies, job vacancy etcetera. Therefore, conventional in-person communication has shifted to virtual interactions commonly known as e-WoM. Electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) signifies an innovative information-sharing method where consumers openly write their reviews and experience with products and services with others, including old existing or potential consumers, fostering a vibrant exchange of information within consumer community. With a simple click on search engine consumer can effortlessly access any information or product reviews, anytime, anywhere. Technology has transformed company's' marketing strategies as to preserve current customers and, allure new, marketers now embrace social media tactics. Through social media platforms consumers' opinions and feedback can be accessed before and after the product launch. Traditional marketing methods have given a way to new strategies where consumers not only rely on information provided by company's' professionals but also seeks insights from fellow consumers who have personally experienced the product. Previously studies have unequivocally demonstrated that consumers have increasingly embraced electronic word of mouth communication over traditional advertising methods. Past researches validate that e-WoM communication has profoundly influenced consumers' attitudes and choices.

Positive e-WoM shared by consumers not only boosts sales of companies but also reflect customer loyalty. However, social media benefits both consumers and firms enabling the latter to establish brand pages on platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. These brand pages facilitate direct interaction between firms and consumers, allowing companies to understand customers' expectations and opinions about the existing products. Frequent activities on these pages strengthen the bond between brand and its consumers. Thus, through collaborative efforts, firm and consumer co-create value and it also shapes a favorable brand image amid consumers.

1.1 Social Media

In various ways humans try to connect themselves with their loved ones. In the past, people used to write letters to stay connected. On the contrary now things have changed with advancement in the information and technology where lives of people are so hectic that they are left with no or little time to socialize. One of the marvels of the technology is that today we can connect in real-time with people irrespective of the geographical locations through social media. Social media is basically a platform where users of similar interest communicate and share their interests. Over the past decade social media has attracted huge number of people and has become quite a popular tool because of user-friendly features. Multiple social media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and several others, have opened up avenues for individuals around the globe to link up and exchange their ideas. Digital social networks have become an essential aspect of our daily existence. Worldwide, approximately 4 billion people utilize social media platforms, with expectations forecasting a rise to 6 billion by 2027. (Statista, 2023). As per recent reports internet subscribers spend 144 minutes on an average on social media. Researchers and marketers also leverage social media platforms in order to connect with consumers across the world, to study their buying patterns, to enable them to recall your brand name via different activities, and to influence them purchase and promote their products. With its rising prominence, social media has garnered a considerable interest of academicians in the recent times where the study has been done to comprehend the perception, attitude, and buying pattern and post purchase behavior of the consumers (Mangold &Faulds, 2009). Social media has not only aided in the social growth of the society but it has also helped marketers too reach out their consumers. Social media with special reference to social networking sites allows its

users not only to connect but also allow its users to socialize with outsiders with whom their interest match. We live in the era of smartphones and microblogging where information is just a click away. It is because of the widespread usage of internet technology, customers now have a distinct opportunity to express their thoughts on various products. Using a variety of platforms users can exchange, discuss, and create content with one another in a community services online. Due to Web 2.0 technology, users can use a variety of platforms to exchange, discuss, and create content with one another in a community. The phenomenon of content democratization, reshaping how businesses and customers interact, has firmly taken hold on the internet and social platforms. Social media empowers customers to effortlessly share and access subjective thoughts, experiences, and opinions. Originally designed for social connections, social media has evolved into a pivotal platform for marketers, offering support across various marketing facets. Its extensive database makes it a potent tool, especially in marketing efforts. Social media proves invaluable for identifying consumer needs, establishing connections, fostering customer engagement, enhancing brand recall, and influencing decision-making and post- purchase satisfaction. Enterprises of various scales, encompassing small firms, non-profit entities, and even political parties, have widely embraced this method as the most effective way to reach their target audiences.

1.1.1 Social networking sites

Feeling of being connected is the significant motivating factor for humans. Social networking sites help people by giving them the platform to connect and stay in touch with each other (Ellison et al., 2007) and also satisfies the necessity of societal relations (Gosling, 2009)

- **Facebook:** Facebook is widely recognized as one of the most widely used social networking sites**, st**arted by Mark Zukcrberg and his students in 2004. People of all generations can be foundon this networking site. On an average Facebook boasts a user base exceeding 2 billion people (Facebook data, 2018).

  Around the world a lot of users use the site for promoting and expanding their business as it is cost effective too. Facebook Inc. renamed as Meta in 2021 is having a 3.59 billion product users (2021).

- **WhatsApp**: Started in 2007, 14 years ago this application enables its users to exchange text and voice messages, engage in voice and video calls, sharing of photos, files, stickers and location services. APP is free to download and easy

to use that is why small business operations are done on the WhatsApp with their targeted consumers (Armstrong Paul, 2009). Application can be used by downloading it in smartphone, pc, and tablets. It has been one of the cost-effective messaging apps to interact globally.

- **Twitter**: Twitter currently rebranded as X was founded in 2006 is a social platform where users share small posts commonly referred as tweets. Tweets have the flexibility to materialize as text, an image or multimedia clips. Twitter initially was for Odeo Inc. employees and their family members but later on became a public network in2006. Earlier tweets were limited to 140 words but in 2017 limit was increased to 280 words. Twitter is considered to be the best source for breaking the news.
- **YouTube**: Other video sharing platform established in 2005 by paypal employees. One this social networking site, users can watch, upload, share, subscribe channels, and create playlist, music videos, blogging, documentaries, educational and devotional clips. Users if wish to upload any video they have to register themselves first. Since YouTube is owned by Google, to sign up Google account is required.
- **Instagram**: Photos and video sharing app was first introduced on iOS in 2010 and then on Android in 2012. Instagram is also one of the apps which belongs to Meta family. Meta owned company Instagram, allow its users to filter their videos and photos with hashtags. Instagram is one the social networking sites which is preferably used by almost all the age groups (Carris & Hayes, 2015). In 2014, only 23% of the internet population used Instagram which rose to 53% in 2015 which almost half of the population using this platform on daily basis (Pew Research, 2013). As per the studies, 30 minutes is an average time spent by the user on Instagram on daily basis and amongst them 81% of the users have used Instagram for products and service research (Christina Newberry, 2021). Initially Instagram was a photo and video sharing application which now has turned out to be a platform to connect with people by following their profiles. The application now also allows its users to message, share and call their followers As of January 2023, Instagram had over 2 billion Instagram users. The rising popular app has majority of its users from India with 330 million users followed by United States with 143 billion users. Artists, Celebrities, Athletes, Brands almost everyone is having their official Instagram account. On one hand where brands are promoting their products and services, there celebrities are not only influencing

but also getting a platform to stay connected with their fans.

A tech-savvy era where things are powered by social media, Instagram is used as marketing tool. Except for the entertainment purpose Instagram has been used by marketers for promoting their products and service across the world. Among different forms of digital marketing, social media marketing stands out as the most impactful marketing tool. The growing popularity of Instagram among its users have brought the organizations to do the business. 79% of the respondents have used Instagram for promoting their business activities. 90 per cent of Instagram users follow at least one brand of the category on Instagram. Whereas 83 per cent discover new product and service through this platform. Instagram has also removed the barrier to visit the stores physically by the option of live video sharing at mass level with its clients, partners and potential consumers. So as to build the customer relations and to add value to the products, quick question answer round, suggestions, and interactions is done via live video (zach & Benson, 2018). Half of the population on Instagram gets influenced to purchase the product when they see ads on Instagram. The growth of Instagram has also happened to be the growth of Instagram influencers. Their huge fan fallowing make their followers' intention to purchase the product.

1.2 Traditional Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is the oldest form of communication for sharing thoughts, information, and sentiments. WoM is an oral communication which has been in existence from decades. In ancient times kings' orders were conveyed by the messenger to the whole empire (Mason.2014).WoM is sharing of details related to product or a brand from one person to another**.** These conversations are usually part of daily conversations. The information exchange may be between two or more people who are known to each other. Harrison-Walker (2001) outlines the concept of word of mouth as "informal person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, product, organization or service". From this definition it is clear that parties involved have one on one casual conversation and the sender without having any commercial interest is voluntarily sharing the information with the receiver. Previously studies have proved that influence of word of mouth has stood stronger than other promotional methods as the purpose of word of mouth is to simply provide the information without any biasness towards the brand, product or the seller. Scholars also state how word of mouth help in shaping the

behavior of consumers. Liu (2006) through his study found that word of mouth is very powerful in case of movies even before their release. People talk about the movie based on their opinions and their judgment of moving hitting the box office. It is also that the more the product is being talked about the more it will create the space in the minds of the people; more chances will be engendered to generate high sales (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). Also in such goods volume of word of mouth plays more substantial role than the valence. Hence, word of mouth spread before the release of movie also attracts the potential consumers. In addition to word of mouth can be either favorable or unfavorable contingent on the experiences of the consumers. Customer satisfaction is closely related with word of mouth. A highly satisfied customer will spread positive information with his friends, family, folks, and colleagues. On the contrary a customer whose expectations are not met will spread unfavorable word of mouth. Moreover word of mouth originating from the group of individuals with whom consumer has strong ties will eventually have great impact. Previously it has also been found that cross culture value also influences consumers to adopt word of mouth (Lam, Lee and Mizerski, 2014). The power of WoM has not been high in case of products but also in service sector or in case of intangible products where the perceived risk is very high specially in case of tourism and hospitality. Thus word of mouth has been considered more relevant and has dominated the other media channels as sender in word of mouth is deemed to be highly dependable and trustworthy source.

1.3 Electronic Word of Mouth: An Overview

The emergence of technology there hassled to an evolution in the word of mouth discourse, a method of interaction that has stood the test of time as one of the oldest. Internet has given individuals to share their judgments, experiences, opinions with others globally (Hung, Chang and Chen, 2023). Ever since the communication has been started word of mouth has been acknowledged as an exceptionally potent source of insight (Maxham & Nelemeyer, 2002; Godes & Mayzlin, 2007). Ever increasing use of internet has influenced the ways people have been seeking for the required information, movie ticket or a smartphone (Guernsey, 2000). From buying a movie ticket to making an investment decision consumer reviews have been given utmost priority (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The second generation of the web facilitates the dissemination of content created by users through various online platforms (Kalpan & Haenle, 2010). Consumer reviews shared through web 2.0 significantly impacts elements of company- customer relations like brand awareness

(Janesen et al. 2009).Traditional word of mouth which was limited by the geographical boundaries could be expanded globally through different online communities. Traditional word of mouth which otherwise attracted few people like friends relatives family is now easily approached to world. Word of mouth which was present for short period of time, now with the advancement in internet and technology communication stay permanently for the consumers. Electronic word of mouth marketing reduces the chances of marketer to influence consumers through promotional tools, advertisements and e-WoM aids product related information directly from its users. Earlier studies have sustained that speed of word of mouth via social media platforms significantly impacts the overall sales of the company (Godes & Mayzlin, 2007). WoM not only benefits consumers but the marketers as well by enabling marketers to engage with consumers and understanding them in a better way. Back in 2008, guitar of famous musician Dave carol was damaged while he was travelling in united airlines. It was due to negligence of the airlines that musicians' guitar got damaged, after filing for the compensation all he could get was flight vouchers worth guitar's repair expense. Being dissatisfied with the airlines musician released his song "United breaks guitar" on YouTube. The song got viral with millions of views in very less time. Later on officials of airlines requested the musician to remove the video as it impacted the sales of the airlines. From this example it is clearly evident that advancement in ICT has made the communication process easier. And, also it illustrates how word of mouth communication has moved to different online platforms, which ultimately has influenced the buying decisions of various people (Barnes & Jacobsen, 2014). This example also reflects that adverse word of mouth regarding the brand or the product will double fold the speed and magnify its influence on consumers' buying decisions. Various shopping sites, blogs, social networking sites, brands own official website all are the platforms of e-WoM (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Various types of e-WoM platforms

e-WoM Platform	Example
Shopping websites	Flipkart.com
Social media sites	Instagram.com
Forums	Reddit.com
Blogs	Tumblr.com
Consumer Review Sites	Yelp.com

Source: Cheung and Thadani (2012)

Among the various marketing tools, word of mouth stands out as the pivotal factors profoundly impacting the consumers buying process. In the past Engel et al., 1969 in their research work conducted telephonic and face to face interviews, which revealed that word of mouth is considered as the fundamental source of information. Previously, Trusov et al., (2009), through their research found that word of mouth has more effect in customer acquisition as compared to traditional methods. In fact study revealed that word of mouth leaves a lasting impression on consumers. Word of mouth referrals resulted in 20-fold more powerful than marketing events and 30-fold more powerful than conventional advertising. As per the studies a lot information related to products and services can be grabbed by consumers on social media either intentionally or unintentionally. Intentionally by liking the posts, commenting on the posts, and unintentionally by following the brands on social media platforms and disseminating their posts with wider audience on various social networking sites. Erkan and Evan (2016) in their study suggested that when consumers adopt e-WoM information on social networking sites than chances of actual purchase increases. The viral e-WoM information can strengthen the thoughts or intention of consumer to make the actual purchase (Madli et al., 2018). Recently purchase intention has been defined as "idiosyncratic state of consumers that countenances consumers' wish to procure good but still not entered the definite purchase stage" (Lie et al., 2020). However, the e-WoM information may not have the same influence on all consumers (Yang, 2012).

1.3.1 Contrasting Traditional Word of Mouth with Electronic Word of Mouth

Prominent distinctions arises when comparing traditional word of mouth with electronic word of mouth. The former entails direct, in-person communication between the sender and receiver, constituting oral, real-time conversations. In contrast, electronic word of mouth unfolds through diverse online platforms like shopping sites and social networking sites. Being available on various online platforms its users have the advantage to access the information anytime. This also removes the limitation of geographical boundaries to avail the required information but e-WoM also affects the privacy of the message as well as sender. On the contrary word of mouth is not easily accessible as at the time of information diffusion the presence of both the parties is required.

Table 1.2 Distinctions between WOM and e-WoM

	WoM	**e-WoM**
Accessibility	Not certainly accessible	Easily accessible
Speed	Speed of sharing information is slow	Information is quickly spread through internet
Credibility	Ensures credibility as both the receiver and sender are known to each other	Chances of sender knowing the receiver are less thus diminishes credibility
Privacy	Conversation between the users is private	Lacks privacy as information available on various online platforms can be accessed Easily

Source: Huete Alcocer (2017)

1.3.2 The dual impact of positive and negative word of mouth

Word of mouth (WoM) has long been acknowledged as having a significant impact on consumer choices. Electronic word of mouth, or e-WoM, has become a major influence on consumer attitudes and behaviors since the internet's inception. When e-WoM is shared via blogs, forums, social media, and online reviews, it reaches a larger

audience and can significantly influence how consumers perceive brands and make decisions about what to buy. The themes of positive and negative word-of-mouth are explored in this literature review, along with their unique effects on consumer purchase intention, brand image, and value co-creation.

Positive Word of Mouth

Favorable or positive word of mouth (WoM) is very important for influencing consumer attitudes and influencing their purchasing decisions. Positive word-of-mouth (WoM) is defined as positive consumer comments and endorsements about a product or service. Research has demonstrated that WoM can significantly improve brand reputation and customer loyalty. (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). A wider audience can now be influenced by happy customers thanks to the growth of electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) via social media, review sites, and online forums (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Studies show that when it comes to high-involvement products like electronics and smartphones, positive e-WoM increases consumer trust and purchase intention (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Furthermore, by enhancing favorable brand associations and perceptions, positive e-WoM supports a strong brand image (Kim, Kim, & Park, 2010). As a result, companies are realizing more and more how important it is to promote positive e-WoM in order to boost their competitive advantage and increase customer engagement (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012).

Impact on Purchase Intention: Favorable reviews and recommendations, or positive e-WoM, greatly increase consumers' propensity to make a purchase. Compared to traditional advertising, recommendations from peers and online influencers are more likely to be trusted and followed by customers. Positive online reviews, for example, boost customer confidence and likelihood to purchase, particularly for high-involvement products like smartphones, according to Cheung and Thadani's (2012) research. Moreover, favorable endorsements generate a domino effect, prompting additional buyers to contemplate and procure the merchandise (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

Influence on Brand Image: Good e-WoM helps create a powerful and positive brand image. Consumers who share positive experiences with a brand increase its credibility and reputation. Positive e-WoM reinforces brand associations and adds to a positive brand personality, according to research by Kim, Kim, and Park (2010). This effect is especially noticeable in the technology industry, where product differentiation in a cutthroat market depends heavily on brand image.

Effect on Value Co-Creation: Positive e-WoM also contributes significantly to value co-creation by encouraging customer interaction and a sense of community. Positive reviews and conversations allow customers to provide advice and ideas that improve the product's overall value proposition. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) claim that this cooperative approach fosters innovation and continual development for businesses in addition to providing value for individual customers.

Negative Word of Mouth

Word of mouth (WoM) that is unfavourable to a brand can significantly affect consumer behaviour and perception. unpleasant word-of-mouth (WoM) is defined as unpleasant remarks and criticisms made by customers about a good or service. It frequently travels fast and has the potential to seriously harm a brand's reputation (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Negative feedback is now more widely disseminated and faster because to the growth of electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) on social media, review sites, and online forums, which makes it harder for firms to handle (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Due to the negativity bias, which occurs when people give more weight to negative information, research shows that negative e-WoM has a greater impact on customer attitudes and purchase intentions than good e-WoM (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). For example, one unfavourable review has the greater power to turn off prospective buyers than multiple favourable reviews (Lee, Park, & Han, 2008). Negative e-WoM can also damage a company's reputation and diminish consumer confidence, which can have a long-term negative impact on client loyalty and corporate success (Park & Lee, 2009). In order to safeguard their reputation and sustain client relations, businesses must create efficient plans to track, handle, and lessen the effects of unfavourable e-WoM (Gregoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009).

Impact on Purchase Intention: Complaints, unfavourable reviews, and critical remarks are examples of negative e-WoM that can seriously turn off potential clients. Due to the negativity bias in human perception, studies have demonstrated that negative reviews have a greater influence on purchase intentions than good ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). A single unfavourable review might cast doubt on several favourable ones, which lowers customer confidence and decreases the possibility that they will make a purchase. It has been shown by Lee, Park, and Han (2008) that negative e-WoM has a greater effect on lowering purchase intentions for gadgets, particularly cellphones.

Influence on Brand Image: A brand's reputation can be seriously harmed by negative e-WoM, which can result in a decline in customer loyalty and trust. Negative reviews that appear

frequently might damage the brand's reputation and make it harder to draw in new business and keep hold of current clients. Negative e-WoM spreads swiftly and can have long-lasting negative consequences on a brand's reputation, according to Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels (2009). In addition, a damaged brand image might make it difficult to introduce new goods or bounce back from a setback.

Effect on Value Co-Creation: By fostering a hostile climate in which customers are less inclined to interact and share pleasant experiences, negative e-WoM can likewise impede value co-creation. Negative e-WoM frequently results in complaints and unhappiness rather than helpful criticism, which can impede innovation and progress. Negative feedback, however, can be a chance for value co-creation if businesses respond to it well and show that they care about their customers' needs (Gregoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009).

All in all, e-WoM has a significant and varied impact on consumer behaviour. While bad e-WoM can have a negative impact on all of these factors, positive e-WoM increases purchase intention, fortifies brand image, and encourages value co-creation. A company's ability to manage positive and negative comments and comprehend the dynamics of e-WoM is essential if it hopes to establish a strong online presence and a devoted clientele. Subsequent studies ought to persist in investigating the pathways by which electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) impacts consumer conduct and ascertain tactics for harnessing favourable e-WoM while alleviating the consequences of unfavourable feedback.

1.4 Social Media and e-WoM

The onset of the digital age has revolutionized traditional marketing activities, giving rise to social networking, blogging, and content generated by users. A key advancement in the marketing has been the utilization of social networking sites for marketing. Among 8.28 billion mobile connection, 4 billion are internet users and the remaining 4 billion are active on social media (e marketer report, 2020). The platform which was once used for assisting business partners online has now become a tool for building better relations with consumers. Social media has obliged brands and companies to find new ways to interact with consumers. Social networking sites gives platform to consumers which allows real consumers to interact and know about the product at any time and from anywhere (Zaglia, 2013; Chen et al., 2013). Electronic word of mouth occurs when on various digital platforms consumers express their feelings and opinions through written content, visuals, and video clips with their friends and acquaintances. Consumers after using the product share their views and

observations regarding the product with fellow consumers, which help them in taking their purchase decision (Liu and Yan, 2022). Such e-WoM when comes from the actual consumers becomes more reliable and trustworthy (Zaglia, 2013; Chen et al., 2013). Consumers participate in e-WoM both intentionally and unintentionally. Consumers after consuming the product or availing the service can intentionally post about it on social media. On the other hand it can be done unintentionally by becoming the fan of the brand, by following them on digital platforms, liking, commenting or sharing their posts without the intention of advertising

1.5 Outline of Smartphone Industry

Smartphones can be defined as a device which is more than texting messages, making and receiving of calls. It is a device which has all the features of basic cell phone, ability to function like computers which as access to internet and various applications and source of entertainment (Winbeing, 2012 & Cassavoy, 2012). Smartphones have also been given the tag of "electronic knives" as they areworthy enough to replace video camera, recorder, notepads (Barkhuus & Polichar, 2011). Smartphones being considered as minicomputers is a pocket friendly device. In United States about 86% of the youth owned their own smartphones (Anderson, 2015). In 2018, number of mobile phone users were more than 75% (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Similarly, survey conducted in the same showed that people rely heavily on their smartphones in their daily lives. Smartphones are essential component of our everyday routine. They have the amazing characteristics of being used as phonebook, for making appointments on calendars and many more such features which satisfies the urge of users (Wilmer, Sherman and Chein, 2017). Smartphones have found their way to enter into the pockets from marketer to students everyone is using portable device in their daily lives. With the progress in the internet and in the telecommunication sector, marketers can reach their customers very conveniently at a negligible cost. Access to information for the customer is controlled by social networking sites or by the manufactures of smartphones through their operating system. From a period of time use of portable devices like smart watches, smartphones, tablets etc. have increased as they are not only helping people to stay connected and updated but also help them track down their health activities, map directions shopping, e- banking. Approximately 95% of the worlds' population uses mobile phones and the rate is even 100 % in some developed nations (Sarker et al., 2019). With the launch of the smartphones, life has become easy as just with the touch of the fingers one can connect with their loved ones,

business partners across the world. In the past it was difficult for people to connect, as landline calls were way more expensive in the past. However now with the latest technology one can talk, text and see their loved ones sitting across abroad. As the term itself says a phone is smart because it holds the features if integrated computer technology, downloading of software application, texting, calling, shopping, higher education, watching movies, music, banking, access to social media etc. Researchers in the past have termed smartphones were more like a brick. Smartphones when initially entered the market, they were heavier and more costly. Earlier Smartphones were useful in the area where network existed. This time has changed today, with the wireless technology, the use of smartphone has become easier and more convenient. During the pandemic when everyone was stuck under the four walls, and few were away from their loved ones, their smartphone was the only device which helped them connect with their family and dear ones. It acted as a savior in the crisis. A survey conducted during the pandemic revealed that more than half of the internet users used smartphones due to the sudden outbreak of covid 19. Not only it helped people connect but also it became a source of entertainment, awareness, and also aided students in pursuing their studies by attending online classes. Smartphones now are considered as an essential tool in everyone's life. It has evolved itself in the past few years that now it has become integral gadget for every age group. Use of smartphones has increased so much so that in one of the surveys conducted reported that half of respondents, participated using smartphones (Kim, 2017). Studies also reveal that use of smartphones in our daily lives enhances and enriches the social interaction (Karikoski & Soikkeli, 2013). Apart from the entertainment purpose, smartphone is used for education purpose as well. When pandemic 19 hit the economy, it was through the use of smartphones that students were able to continue their studies. During pandemic, lockdowns were enforced, almost everyone had to stay indoors, and everything was shut for a while even the schools. Just like other sectors pandemic hit the education sector drastically. When schools were completely closed students had to attend classes virtually. Online classes were introduced through various platforms like ZOOM, Google Meet. Smartphones brought the paradigm shift the way use to acquire knowledge. Individuals had to do all the desk work of office from home. As such lifestyles of people was changing their digitalization had a significant role to play. In such tough times smartphones had gained their popularity, in particular during COVID- 19. As usage of internet via smartphones is more convenient than using the

internet via computer (Figge, 2004). Smartphones had played a significant role during pandemic by connecting people from various parts of the world. Smartphones from the learning purpose either formally or informally have been stated as easy- to-go device (yi et al., 2016) which helps to enrich the knowledge and sharing of the same with others as well (Anshari et al., 2017). Pocket friendly smartphones have replaced traditional methods of teaching which was limited within the walls of the institutes, as of now students by using smartphones can not only learn in the classroom but can continue their learning in any corner of the world (Mokoena,2012). Earlier studies have concluded that students from various streams can employ smartphones at different phases of their learning journey (Firmanysh et al., 2020). Furthermore different studies have also suggested that how teachers can guide their students about how smartphones can aid in their learning and can improve their performance in academic (Clayton & Murphy, 2016).

In the past researchers have stated that use of smartphones in the collection of data could be more appropriate and more realistic (Miller, 2012). Smartphones can be used by researchers in the data collection by replacing dairy notes with audio notes (Monrouxe, 2009). By using this portable device, it will not only save the time of the researchers (Gracia et al., 2016) but also become convenient for the respondents of the study to participate (hill et al., 2011). Previous studies also indicate the usage of smartphones have increased their productivity at work (Wei & Lo, 2006). Though online shopping was in existence years ago, but covid-19 bought it much more into the trend. In 2020 online shopping sales were 21.3% which was 5% more than that of 2019 (Canio, Blasco & Martinelli, 2022). Neilson (2020) in study reported 40% of the consumers globally opted for the online shopping. As COVID-19 fueled the online shopping it also led to the wide sales of mobile devices (Chopdar et al., 2022). More than 80% of world population own at least one smartphone (Bankmycell.com, 2022). The surprising fact to this figure is that people who do not like using their smartphones have used the device widely for multiple purposes (De Canio et al., 2016).

1.5.1 Evolution of smartphones

First Phase: Before the smartphone came into existence, Martin cooper known as father of cellphone launched the Motorola Dyna Tac 8000 X. The history of smartphones is mainly divided into three phases. First phase started when the

word smartphone was popped and the smartphones were mainly used by the business enterprises. And the features of the smartphone were as per the corporate requirements. It was 10 years later when IBM introduced its first ever smartphone in 1992 but it was not available in the market for the purchase for two years. It was popularly called Simon's smartphone. Simon smartphone with early screen had the feature of sending and receiving emails and fax. The prices of the smartphone was way too costly. That was the reason that in six months of its launch it sold only 50000 units. Later on in the year 1996, Nokia introduced 9000 communicators, though the phone launched was bulky but it was powerful at that time. Nokia 9000 was never officially termed smartphone but held all the features of mailing, fax, spreadsheets, web browsing with the memory of 8MB. Today where we cannot imagine a gaming world beyond angry bird or Candy crush but there was a time where snake game was one kind of a thing.

Second Phase: This phase is mainly termed as turning point in smartphone industry. This phase started in 2007 when, Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple, introduced iPhone. This smartphone launch was ahead of all the smartphones launched till time. iPhone had all the advanced features like 3-inch diagonal screen which was finger friendly, 2-megapixel camera, 4GB model was priced for 499$, 8GB priced for 599$. As per Statista 1.39 million units of i-phones were sold in 2007. In the early days the android company was working advanced operating system for digital cameras, but later on discovered that market for the same was very limited. Company tried to negotiate the deals with the other companies like Samsung and HTC and later on was acquired by GOOGLE which till the time is known as best deal in the market. Then they started working towards android smartphones. Now the android smartphones launched were with a viewpoint that these phones hold all the features of smartphones but at less cost so as to attract more consumers.

Third Phase: This phase bridges the gap between the prior two phases which was entitled as business enterprises and general consumers. After the launch of iPhone, iPhone 3G was announced in 2008. This model not only provided better internet speed it also offered more storage and location service. And this time i-Phone was launched at lesser price, selling 8GB model for 199$ and 16 GB for 299$. Since then, iPhone has undergone many changes from bigger

screens, waterproofing, fingerprint sensor to face id and increasing sales. Another benchmark was set in 2008 by the time many new players also entered the market (Apple, HTC, Samsung, Nokia, and LG). HTC dream was the first android phone to be launched by Google. Android 1.0 came with the features like Internet browser, YouTube, Google Maps, Camera, Synchronization of Gmail and calendar. In the same year (2008) Nokia and Blackberry announced touched smartphones. This phase logically is the up gradation in operating system of smartphone Out of the 7 operating system (Blackberry OS, Symbian, Palm OS, Windows Mobile, Web OS, IOS, ANDROID) only ANDROID and IOS stand strong in the smartphone industry, as not only it swept the other small but also updated with passage of time and requirement of the consumers.

1.5.2 Growth of Smartphone Industry

Now globally people are not using the smartphones merely for the conversations but also for sharing the information, source of entertainment (games, music, movies), reading news, shopping, banking transactions, Google maps for directions, doing business etc. (technopak,2019). Since the launch of i-Phone in 2007 and Android smartphones in 2008, the smartphones market has been developing. Presently, the smartphone segment is experiencing the most rapid growth in the telecom industry. It was in 2013, when for the first-time sales of smartphones outraged the sales of basic mobile phones. In 2013, smartphones captured more than half of the market. Globally smartphone market has seen an outstanding growth from 2009 to 2016. Wherein the former year 173 million smartphones were shipped and later on the shipment increased to 1.47 billion in the latter year. Around the globe where the estimated population is 7.4 billion among them 6.3 billion are the subscribers of the smartphones and the figure is expected to rise 7.7 billion by 2027. Much of its credit is given to Steve Jobs launch of i-Phone which came with multimedia functions which were different from the basic features of all the smartphones. Nevertheless, as per the survey conducted in 2017 Google's' android is popular for enjoying 80% of the market share and Apple IOS leads second in the race with 15% market share. The growth of the industry has been tremendously increasing not only in the market size but also in the number of models and vendors. All the leading companies of smartphones like Samsung, Apple, SONY, Xiaomi, Oppo, Vivo, are unveiling their smartphones with

latest 5G technology which is leading to the growth of the market.

Indian market is said to be the most profitable market due to its improving infrastructure, growth of e-commerce, cheap labor and internet usage. The other reason behind the growing smartphone industry in Indian market is various government incentives enjoyed by the manufacturers in India. Eventually smartphone shipment increased to 16 per cent YoY after the Performance Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI), under "Make in India" program. In 2018, world's biggest manufacturing unit was opened by Samsung in the second most densely populated country on earth, amid the tough competition from Chinese smartphone brands. In the year 2022, with 22 per cent smartphone shipment OPPO led the Make in India Program and also declared 'Vihaan Initiative" to empower local supply chain. Samsung running second with 21 per cent share also increased the manufacturing of premium phones. In the year 2020, second most populous country of the world was on rise with 696 million smartphone users approximately. The growth of the industry in India can also be forecasted from the number of shipments of smartphones which has tremendously increased from 3.53 million units in second quarter of 2012 to 54 million units in 2020. As per MC Kinsey report, number of smartphone subscribers would double in 2023 to that of 560 million subscribers that were in 2018. Apple's i-Phone13 was marked as best-selling smartphone in Indian market with share of 4%, which was followed Samsung galaxy, Redmi both with 3% market share. According to Cyber Media Research, 5g smartphones shipment in India have skyrocketed by 74% where Samsung is leading the segment with 23% market share followed by One plus with 15% market share.

1.5.3 Leading Smartphones Brands

According to the counterpoint research amongst the various smartphone brands, top five smartphone brands with highest market share are Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, Oppo and Vivo. Apple and Samsung have been giving the neck-to-neck competition globally in the smartphone industry. In fourth quarter of 2022 Apple, replaced Samsung by launching i-Phone14 series with the market share of 23 per cent and achieved it highest ever global shipment and operating profit share in 2022. Samsung which has been the brand of mobile gadgets as well as home appliances manages to maintain its position among leading smartphone vendors. Samsung's major selling smartphones are from galaxy s series.

Recently Samsung Galaxy S-22 has been considered the best-selling android smartphone in the premium sector market. The quote "Change is the only constant factor" rightly fits in the smartphone industry. The once who changes and innovates with the time gets to stay in the market while others have to bid a farewell. Prior to the launch of i- Phone no one could ever think that brand like Nokia would be an outsider. Nokia has dominated the smartphone market with almost 50 per cent market share and has sold over 250 million units of Nokia 1100 and Nokia 11110. Similar case has been with the Blackberry devices, who once was selling the smartphones with all the unique features like QWERTY keyboard lost its value when other smartphones brands improved and it led to decline in the revenue of blackberry. Recently Huawei, who was constantly competing with the top brands like Apple and Samsung, once also was also leading in second quarter of 2020, but failed to appear in top five since second quarter of 2021. However, top five leading brands in smartphone industry are Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, Oppo, and Vivo.

Table 1.3 shows the list of leading smartphone brand sin the world from the year 2021 to 2022.

Table 1.3

Market Share of Global Smartphone Shipments								
Brands	Q2 2021	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2022	Q1 2023
Apple	15%	14%	22%	18%	16%	16%	23%	21%
Samsung	18%	20%	19%	23%	21%	21%	19%	22%
Xiaomi	16%	13%	12%	12%	13%	13%	11%	11%
Oppo	10%	11%	9%	9%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Vivo	10%	10%	8%	8%	9%	9%	8%	7%
Others	31%	32%	30%	30%	31%	31%	29%	29%

Source: Counterpoint Research (2023)

- **Apple**: In 1976, Steve Jobs along with Wozniak and Ronald founded Apple in the garage of Steve's parents. In 1984 Apple launched Mac Pc and enjoyed

great success and later in 2001 million of units were sold of Apple iPod, a music listening device. But, later on when smartphone became talk of the town sale of iPod declined eventually. In 2007, Apple brought a revolutionary change in the telecommunication sector by launching its iPhone which was minicomputer in hand, with the internet. According to CEO, Steve Jobs "i" in iPhone, iPod, iPad, symbolizes "individual, internet, inform, inspire and instruct". Apple's iPhone runs on the operating system named iOS it also enables its users to download third party apps through App store. Ever since its launch iPhone with its innovation skills has been providing high quality products to its users which distinguishes their product from the competitors. Marketing strategy of Apple has been to manufacture the premium products for its users which also enhances the value for brand (Odaymat, 2018). Out of the data collected from 263 countries by the World Bank GDP in 2018 was near 85 trillion, out of which Apple's share was 1.5%. Amongst the iPhone series, iPhone 13 has been considered as best-selling smartphone of year 2022, with 28% share, which is more than one fourth of all the iPhone sales. In 2022 when iPhone 13 was launch Apple started the ad campaign "Relax, its iPhone", which showed how iPhone can even on the hard surfaces. Ever since of its launch iPhone 13 has been on the top of every month, till the next launch. Over the years Apple's marketing has been strong enough to attract loyal customers. Loyalty of customers for Apple has enhanced to this extent that it has defeated the renowned brands like Coca-Cola and Google. As per Statista (2022) survey was conducted in India which showed that 27% of smartphone users would like to switch to Apple's iPhone in the future.

- **SAMSUNG:** Samsung which is a biggest business tycoon of South Korea was established in the year 1938 by Lee Byung-Chull. The word Samsung in Korea denotes "three stars" and the perception of the company was to be as powerful and everlasting as the stars in the sky. Samsung is considered to be one of the leading companies in consumer and industry goods. Though Samsung has been leading in smartphone industries form a decade or more but the company is also having its print in other sectors such as army devices, memory chips, electronics, LCD, semiconductor, aerospace etc. Samsung has been considered amongst top 20 companies of the world and has been ranked as second largest company amongst top tech companies. Recently in the year 2019, Samsung electronics completed its 50 years of successful journey. With commitment of

continuous innovation globally Samsung has managed to be among top leaders in semiconductors and smartphones. It was in 2000's when Samsung came with galaxy series and it became globally the best-selling smartphone in the market. Ever since Samsung launched its first galaxy series it has dominated smartphone market; it almost overtook the leading Nokia Company which once captured half of the market. In short span of time Samsung increased its market share from 3% in 2009 to 32% in 2012 and maintained its position as global leader. Currently Galaxy A, Galaxy J and Galaxy M series are the low and mid-range budgeted smartphones. In the premium section flagship smartphones are Galaxy S and Galaxy Z series. After the decline of sales in pandemic, Samsung has sold 1.43 billion units in 2021. Samsung from its galaxy family named "Galaxy A13 and Galaxy A03, captured the two spots among the top selling smartphones (Counterpoint research, 2022) In the middle east Samsung has captured the highest percentage of market share among other smartphone brands in 2022. Recently in 2023 Samsung also launched 5g smartphone from Galaxy F and Galaxy M series.

- **Xiaomi:** Xiaomi is a Chinese company founded in 2010, headquartered in Beijing is the fourth largest smartphone company (Tabasuum & Ahmed, 2020). Xiaomi initially was a startup which gain its popularity in short span of time and is now amongst top companies globally. The CEO of the company referred mi in the name stands for mobile internet or mission impossible as they faced many obstacles initially, and Xiao refers to grain of a rice symbolizing starting things from small sections. Besides the smartphone market, Xiaomi has been doing great in wearable with MI's Fitbit watch by giving direct competition to Apple iWatch. The organization is well known for selling smartphones under the brand name of Redmi and MI. Xiaomi is doing great in other sectors but has the specialization in smartphones market. In 2021, Xiaomi did the total shipment of more than 190 million units and shared around 15% of the global smartphone market whereas, it's shipped around 145 million units in 2020. Similarly, in the home market as well Xiaomi has been among top smartphone brands with other brands like Oppo and Vivo, whereas in India Xiaomi enjoys the market share of 20%. In India Xiaomi has done the market segmentation where it has been selling mid-range smartphones under MI brand worth 20,000 rupees or more. And to reach the masses who cannot afford high priced smartphones Xiaomi launched the smartphones under the sub-brand Redmi selling and less costly

smartphones. Xiaomi has been producing less costly products with all the compact functions is also often named as 'coolest company' who is committed with continuous innovation in products. In second quarter of 2022 Xiaomi did the third highest shipment globally (Canalys, 2022). For the fourth time in the history Xiaomi made it to the Fortune Global top 500 companies by coming at 266th position. Globally Apple and Samsung have been the key major players in the smartphone sector, but after the decline in the sale of Huawei, Xiaomi has managed to be with both the leading smartphone brands at third spot. In total, all the three brands hold more than half of the smartphone market.

- **Oppo:** Oppo is a Chinese company, headquartered in Dongguan dealing in electronics was launched in 2004. In 2008 Oppo entered the smartphone market and since 2016 it has been among top 5 brands at global level. Founder of Oppo, Tony Chen and his team has earlier worked with BBK Company and thus have widespread knowledge in electronics sector. Oppo launched its first smartphone with a 'smiley face' in 2008, in order to spread positivity and inspiration through technology and it also speaks of the slogan of the brand "Inspiration Ahead". Oppo has also attained a prominent position in the headphones, watches, and tablets. Market share of Oppo is Asia has been continuously increasing every year. Recently oppo market share has been around 10% and has shipped around 25 million units in the third quarter of 2022. In country like Africa, Oppo has been successfully selling smartphones at price less than 400 US Dollars and covering the market by 97%. In 2021, among top 50 global brands in china under brand Z category, Oppo ranked 6th. In the year 2020 Oppo Find X2 pro was b awarded as best camera phone. Oppo has been selling the smartphones with N series, X series, F series, A series, K series, and Reno series. OnePlus is a subsidiary of Oppo, which launched its first smartphone in the year 2014. Brands' first "OnePlus 1" claimed the title of "flagship killer" as the phone had good specification form the competitors' and was less costly from the other phones. Amongst the newly launched OnePlus series "Nord CE 2 Lite" has been the top-selling 5g smartphone of Q1 of 2023.
- **Vivo:** This Telecommunication Company is a Chinese multinational corporation, headquartered in Dongguan, founded in 2010 is a subsidiary of

BBK electronics. In 2011 vivo officially entered in the world of smartphones and released its first smartphone V1 and was extensively appreciated. In 2012 Vivo introduced the world's slimmest smartphone Vivo X1 which was 6.55 mm thick With 8% market share globally Vivo is among top 5 smartphone brands. Company has developed its own operating system named 'Fun Touch' for its mobile users. Recently company introduced the latest version of "FunTouchOS 13" it gives its users more personalization and sense of security, color changing home screen icons. In 2022, Vivo made a Guinness book ofrecords for capturing longest video ever for 11 days. Vivo is also known for manufacturing low cost affordable and midrange smartphones has tremendously grown over the time and is now manufacturing premium phones as well. Vivo entered the Europe market in 2020 with X and Y series. Market share of Vivo in Asia, in 2022 witnessed a slight increase from that of previous year. In the same year market shareof Vivo in Indonesia was around 15%. However Vivo shipment worldwide was around 100 million units. In 2022 Vivo also became the sponsor of FIFA world cup. In 2019 Vivo unveiled its first 5g smartphone. Over the years products of Vivo have been X series, S series, iQOO, X Fold, X Note, V series. Vivo flagship phones come under the X range but at mid-range prices where usually innovations are done in the camera of the phones. Whereas Y, S and V series cover low range smartphones. While there are few smartphones which are not shipped in all the countries, IQOO is among them. But recently IQOO series which is mainly famous for gaming and focuses Gen Z has entered the other markets globally aswell.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Review of Literature serves as foundational framework for comprehending the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of our study. In this chapter, we undertake a critical examination of key concepts, theories, and empirical research pertaining to the impact of electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) on purchase intent is mediated by brand image and value co-creation. The chapter is organized into distinct thematic sections, each dedicated to a critical facet of this intricate relationship. In this chapter researcher embark on an exploration of the fundamental concepts of e-WoM and its contemporary significance in marketing. Here, establishes the groundwork by providing a comprehensive definition of key concepts, tracing its evolution, and elucidating its pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior. It also focusses into the theoretical underpinnings that form the bedrock of our study.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations: Unraveling the Mechanisms

In this section, we embark on a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical frameworks that underpin our study, providing the conceptual scaffolding upon which our research stands.

2.2.1 Social Influence Theory:

This theory is vital in comprehending consumer behavior dynamics, highlighting the profound influence wielded by social interactions and recommendations on individual decision-making processes (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). This theory posits that individuals are inherently predisposed to be swayed by the actions, opinions, and behaviors of their peers, a phenomenon deeply ingrained in human social psychology. Within the framework of e-WoM, this implies that when consumers encounter recommendations or endorsements from their network, they are more prone to be swayed in their purchasing choices. (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). The sway of peer recommendations on consumer behavior, particularly within the realm of e-WoM, emerges as a critical aspect of consumer decision-making processes. Studies consistently affirm that recommendations from trusted individuals hold substantial sway in shaping consumer preferences (Brown &

Reingen, 1987). Consumers have in those they know or regard as credible sources. Online communities, encompassing forums, social media groups, and review platforms, serve as dynamic hubs where consumers converge to exchangeinformation, seek advice, and share experiences (Hennig- Thurau et al., 2004). Within these communities, collective wisdom and shared knowledge significantly influence purchasing decisions. Consumers turn to these platforms to seek validation, gather insights, and make informed choices based on the experiences of others (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). These insights are vital in deciphering the multifaceted impact of e-WoM on brand image, value co-creation, and, ultimately, purchase intention.

2.2.2 Source Credibility Theory

In the contemporary digital landscape, Source Credibility Theory gains heightened significance due to the proliferation of information and the diversity of sources available to consumers. The theory acknowledges that consumers are discerning individuals who evaluate information sources based on their perceived trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Within the realm of e-WoM, this implies that the source of a recommendation or review significantly influences how it is received. Consumers are inclined to prioritize and act upon information originating from sources they deem credible. Consumers have become increasingly sophisticated in discerning credible sources in the digital space (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). They tend to gravitate towards recommendations from sources they perceive as reliable, knowledgeable, and trustworthy. When a source is regarded as credible, the information it imparts carries a higher degree of authority, influencing consumers' perceptions and decisions. The impact of credible sources on Brand Perception is far-reaching and enduring. In a landscape where consumers are bombarded with information, the endorsement or recommendation from a credible source serves as a powerful signal (Eisend, 2006). Positive e-WOM from trusted sources contributes to the cultivation of a favorable brand image and reputation, fostering positive associations in the minds of consumers. Furthermore, Source Credibility Theory emphasizes that credibility is not an absolute trait but is contingent on various factors and contexts (Pornpitakpan, 2004). The perceived expertise, objectivity, and personal connection with the source all contribute to the overall credibility of e-WoM. For instance, an e-WoM message from a well-known industry expert may carry more weight than a similar message from an anonymous user, given the perceived expertise of the former.

In essence, understanding the interplay between Source Credibility Theory and the trustworthiness of e-WoM sources is essential for marketers maneuvering through dynamic digital terrain. It underscores the imperative of cultivating and preserving credibility in e-WoM efforts. By strategically aligning with trusted influencers or ensuring that messaging emanates from reliable sources, brands can enhance the effectiveness of their e-WoM initiatives, positively impacting consumer perceptions and decisions.

2.2.3 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) crafted by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) serves as a pivotal basis for understanding how individuals process and respond to persuasive messages. This model delineates two distinct paths: the central and the peripheral route (Hung, Chang and Chen, 2023). In the context of e-WoM, the ELM proves invaluable, as it suggests that consumers may engage with e-WoM messages through varying levels of cognitive processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Some individuals may meticulously scrutinize the information presented, evaluating its merits, relevance, and credibility (central route). Others may rely on more superficial cues or mental shortcuts, such as the popularity of the messages or the reliability of the source, to form their judgments (peripheral route). This differentiation between the dual processing routes within the context of e-WoM is particularly pertinent, as it highlights that consumers' processing approach may vary based on factors such as the extent of their involvement with the products or services, their expertise in the subject matter, and the context in which the information is presented (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Understanding these distinct routes sheds light on how e-WoM messages are received and internalized by different segments of the audience. Moreover, analyzing the Cognitive Processing of e-WoM Information unveils the cognitive mechanisms at play when consumers engage with e-WoM content (Ha & McCann, 2008). In instances where individuals opt for the central processing route, they engage in thoughtful analysis, carefully weighing the information presented. This depth of processing results in a more comprehensive evaluation of the e-WoM message and its implications. In contrast, those who adopt the peripheral route engage in more heuristic-based processing. They rely on cues that require less cognitive effort, potentially being swayed by factors like the reputation of the source or the persuasive techniques employed (Petty & Wegener, 1999). Understanding these cognitive processes is crucial for marketers seeking to craft e-WoM messages that resonate

with their target audience. In summary, the Elaboration Likelihood Model offers a nuanced perspective on how individuals process and respond to persuasive messages, including e-WoM. By recognizing the dual processing routes and analyzing the cognitive mechanisms involved, we gain valuable insights into how e-WoM can be effectively leveraged in contemporary marketing efforts.

2.2.4 Information Adoption Model (IAM)

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) provides a nuanced understanding of how consumers engage with e-WoM messages, shedding light on the cognitive processes that underlie their decision-making (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It delineates a series of stages through which individuals progress as they encounter and process information. Exposure marks the initial stage in the IAM, where consumers first come into contact with e-WoM messages (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This exposure can transpire through various digital channels, including social media, review platforms, or online forums. It is at this juncture that consumers are presented with the opportunity to access information and form their initial perceptions. Subsequently, attention involves consumers actively focusing on and allocating mental resources to process the information (Malthouse et al., 2013). This stage is pivotal, as it determines whether the information will be actively attended to or relegated to the periphery of the consumer's awareness. Factors such as message relevance, novelty, and personal relevance can influence this attentional process. Comprehension follows closely, as consumers endeavor to understand the content and extract meaning from the e-WoM message (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This involves interpreting the information in light of their existing knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. Effective communication strategies that facilitate comprehension are critical in ensuring that the intended message is accurately received and interpreted. Acceptance represents the final stage, wherein consumers evaluate the integrity and relevance of the content presented (Malthouse et al., 2013). At this juncture, consumers decide whether to believe and internalize the message, or to dismiss it as inconsequential or unreliable. Trust in the source, perceived expertise, and message consistency are all factors that influence this critical acceptance process. Facilitating Information Flow for Value Co- Creation is integral to the IAM process (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This entails creating establishing an setting that supports the seamless exchange of information between consumers and companies. User-friendly platforms, responsive customer service, and strategies that encourage open communication are all instrumental in fostering an atmosphere conducive to value co-

creation.

Recognizing that consumers may progress through these stages at varying speeds and with differing levels of engagement is crucial (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Individual differences, prior experiences, and the complexity of the information can all influence the pace at which consumers move through the stages. Tailoring e-WoM strategies to accommodate these variations is paramount for companies seeking to effectively engage diverse consumer segments. Hence, the Information Adoption Model provides a valuable framework for understanding how consumers engage with e-WoM messages. By acknowledging the distinct stages of exposure, attention, comprehension, and acceptance, companies can refine their e-WoM strategies to align more effectively with consumer cognitive processes. Moreover, creating an environment conducive to information flow fosters value co-creation and fortifies consumer-company relationships.

2.3 Understanding e-WoM in Contemporary Marketing

Word of Mouth (WOM) holds paramount significance in consumer behavior, denoting the informal interchange of viewpoints, endorsements, and encounters related to commodities and amenities (Smith & Vogt, 1995). This person-to-person communication, frequently grounded in individual experiences, bears substantial legitimacy, exerting a profound impact on decision-making mechanisms. In today's digital age, the advent of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM) has redefined this phenomenon (Verma & Yadav, 2022). e-WoM encompasses WOM that occurs within the vast online sphere, facilitated by an array of digital platforms (Sahira et al., 2023). Social media, forums, review sites, and online communities have become pivotal channels for e-WoM dissemination (Nyagadza et al., 2023; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This digital evolution has revolutionized the reach and impact of WOM, expanding its influence to an unprecedented scale. Central to both WoM and e-WoM is the critical element of trust. In traditional WoM, trust is often established through personal relationships and shared experiences. Friends and family serve as trusted sources, and their recommendations hold significant sway in decision-making. e-WoM introduces a distinct trust-building dynamic, relying on factors such as the "credibility of the content and platform, the reputation of the source, and the quality of information shared" (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Online reviews and rating systems play a pivotal role in establishing trust within the digital realm. One of the defining characteristics of e-WoM is its potential for exponential reach and impact. Unlike traditional WOM, which is confined

to personal networks, e-WoM possesses the capacity to go viral. A single review, comment, or recommendation in an online community can swiftly reach a global audience. This amplification effect is transformative for brands and marketers, as it exponentially extends the reach of their products or services (Brown et al.,2007).

The contagious aspect of electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM) possesses the capability to thrust a brand into the limelight or, conversely, precipitate its downfall. Furthermore, e-WoM furnishes consumers with the authority to express their viewpoints, disseminate their encounters, and sway the purchasing choices of others. This participatory facet stands as a propelling catalyst behind the surge of e-WoM. Consumers have transcended the role of passive recipients of information; they now actively immerse themselves in dialogues, evaluations, and deliberations concerning products and brand entities (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). This shift from passive consumption to active participation has redefined the dynamics of consumer-brand interactions. The advent of the digital age has brought about a revolutionary transformation in how information is disseminated and consumed. This shift has redefined the dynamics of consumer decision-making and brand perception. Online reviews, a key component of e-WoM, have become virtual touchstones for consumers seeking insights into products and services. These reviews serve as authentic testimonials from fellow consumers, offering valuable perspectives on the quality and performance (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). They carry a level of credibility that traditional advertising often struggles to match, as they are based on real-world experiences rather than persuasive marketing tactics. Furthermore, social media platforms have emerged as dynamic hubs of consumer interaction and information sharing (Silaban et al., 2023). Users turn to platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram not only for social engagement but also as forums for discussing products, sharing recommendations, and seeking advice from their online communities (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Viral nature of digital era allows for the swift dissemination of opinions and experiences, amplifying the power of e-WoM (Gvili & Levy, 2018). Forums dedicated to specialized niches or industries have also gained prominence as valuable sources of e-WoM. These digital communities provide a platform for enthusiasts and customers to engage in detailed conversations about various offerings. Such forums often attract individuals with a deep interest and expertise in a particular domain, making their recommendations particularly influential (Brown et al., 2007).

As e-WoM continues to flourish, its cumulative effect on consumer behavior and brand perception is substantial. Consumers now turn to these digital channels as trusted sources

of information, valuing the authentic voices of their peers (Nilashi et al., 2022). The exponential growth of e-WoM is indicative of its growing significance in shaping consumer choices (Kim, Kandampully &Bilgihan, 2018). Its significance reverberates through numerous studies, all of which underscore its profound impact on consumer decision-making processes. Research consistently demonstrates that positive e-WoM not only influences consumer attitudes but also translates into tangible actions, such as increased purchase intentions and sales (Chen et al., 2020; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). In essence, e-WoM acts as a catalyst that propels consumers towards making purchasing decisions, drawing them closer to products or services that have received favorable reviews and recommendations. This can be attributed to the inherent trust and credibility that consumers place in their peers' experiences and opinions, which, in turn, are shared through e-WoM channels. When individuals encounter positive testimonials about a product or service, it instills a sense of confidence and assurance in their potential purchase, leading to a higher likelihood of conversion.

Furthermore, e-WoM plays a pivotal role in shaping brand perception. Positive sentiments expressed through online reviews adds to the construction of favorable product image (L.N. & L.T, 2023). This image, in turn, can lead to increased brand loyalty, as consumers associate positive experiences with the brand (Cantal lops, Cardona & Salvi, 2018). The influence of e-WoM extends beyond mere transactional considerations. It creates a platform for consumers to access a diverse array of opinions and experiences. Liu (2006) underscores the crucial contribution of e-WoM in fostering a sense of community and shared knowledge among consumers. This communal aspect of e-WoM provides individuals with a forum to seek advice, exchange insights, and engage in discussions about various products and services. As consumers engage with this wealth of information, they construct their own perceptions and form brand associations. In this digital age, e-WoM has become a cornerstone of contemporary marketing strategies. Its potency lies in its ability to facilitate genuine, peer-to-peer interactions and empower consumers as engaged participants in the consumer decision- making journey. To summarize, the significance of e-WoM in contemporary marketing is underscored by its demonstrable impact on consumer behavior. Positive e-WoM translates into increased purchase intentions and sales, contributing to brand success. Moreover, e-WoM fosters a sense of community among consumers, providing them with a platform to access diverse opinions and experiences. As a result, e-WoM stands as a pivotal component of modern marketing strategies.

2.3.1 Engaging in e-WoM

On various online platforms, electronic word of mouth shares information. Message, sender and receiver are the three primary components of e-WoM, as stated by the researchers. The message encompasses information, which can be positive, negative, or a mix of both. The sender is the individual sharing the information, and the receiver is the one who receives it.

- **Message:** In the initial phases of information reception, the credibility of the information holds pivotal importance. Credibility remains wholly subjective, contingent upon the receiver's perception of the information's authenticity (Cheung et al., 2009). Elevated benchmarks of message quality significantly heighten the prospects of consumers wholeheartedly embracing electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM). Messages can span the spectrum from positive to negative or encompass a blend of both. Positive e-WoM tends to stimulate consumer purchases, while negative messages exert the opposite effect. Past scholars have argued that the influence of negative word-of-mouth outweighs that of positive e-WoM (Cheung et al., 2009). Nonetheless, a study by Lim and Van Der (2015) discovered that positive reviews hold more credibility than negative ones, especially within the restaurant context. Hence, it can be inferred that e-WoM's impact on consumers might fluctuate across diverse product categories. The credibility of a message intricately hinges on the coherence evident among reviews. If consumers discern consistency among messages shared by various users, they are more likely to perceive the message as credible.

  Conversely, when a message lacks consistency, the receiver may cast doubt on its credibility. The other element of message is that it goes through rating, which is given by other users. Previously it has been studied that the higher the rating of the review more chances are generated of e-WoM being adopted. Likewise. Volume of e-WoM also decides the credibility of message. Generally, a product having large number of reviews attracts more attention of the consumers. However, it has been stated previously that information overload may adversely affect the decision of consumers.

- **Source and Sender:** The source of message may decide the impact e-WoM will have on receiver. The precision of the shared information is contingent upon the expertise and knowledge possessed by the source. Cheng and Zhou (2010) argue

that experts generally have more knowledge about the particular product or service. The expertness of the source could be determined on the basis of information, reputation of website and reviewer. Websites are the platforms for consumers where they can seek and search the information they need. Henceforth, website with good reputation will be more credible to the consumers than reviews shared by company's' professionals. Likewise, people will often form more connections with the people who share similar characteristics. In such situation consumer tend to rely more on the reviews shared by consumers who are similar to them. Similarity may be in age, gender, nationality, interests, qualifications etcetera. Also, the stronger the relation is of the receiver with the source, more he will perceive the message.

- **Receiver:** The individual who receives information through various platforms is termed as the receiver, and the reception of e-WoM (electronic word-of- mouth) can vary among users. Several factors, including trust in the information source, previous experiences with the product or seller, prior knowledge, and moreover, the depth of personal involvement plays a crucial role in determining the extent to which e-WoM exerts its influence on individuals. When a receiver receives information from a source they trust, the likelihood of them adopting the e-WoM is significantly higher (Cheng & Zhou, 2010). Trustworthy sources significantly contribute to molding the perception of brand's trustworthiness. When consumers receive information about a brand from a source they perceive as trustworthy, it positively influences their perception of the brand's reliability and credibility (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

2.3.2 Dimensions of e-WoM

- **Argument Quality:** The assessment of argument quality is a subjective judgment made by individuals to determine the usefulness of information. When electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM) is transparent and pertinent to consumers in a manner that aids their decision-making process, it is deemed of good quality. Researchers have given various attributes of argument quality. To consumers e-WoM will be of quality if it is relevant, timely, and accurate (Lee and Shin, 2014). While relevance and comprehensiveness are the two key elements for determining effectiveness of the information (Dancer et al., 2014). The quality of the argument can also be determined on the basis of the gap in the content delivered and the actual fact. The good quality e-WoM will show the true picture of the product, whereas low quality e-WoM will derive the user away from the reality. After conducting the survey of 320 respondents of Taiwan, Tsao &

Hsieh (2015) stated that e-WoM quality positively influences the purchase intention of smartphones and computer software.

- **Credibility**: Credibility is defined as those characteristics in information which leads to acceptance of e-WoM information by receiver (Lis, 2013). As per Eagle and Chaiken (1993) source credibility positively affects the thoughts, or attitude of the receiver. If receiver perceives the information as credible their confidence in making the purchase decision is significantly bolstered. Moreover, in the decision-making process, information credibility is considered to be as an important determinant (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008). Previously researchers have stated that credibility in the e-WoM information speaks about effectiveness of e-WoM, (Wu & Wang, 2011), and credibility also motivates the receivers to follow the recommendation given by the old consumers (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Consumers usually will trust the e-WoM information if available on reputed websites. Consumers will not pay the attention if information is not credible. Furthermore, Manan et al., (2019); Zhang et al., (2014) unveiled consumer purchase intention is determined by e-WoM credibility. Especially in case of online purchases, where consumer mind is backed with thoughts of fraud, there e-WoM information is aids in building the trust of the consumers. The better the credibility the more the chances of the product being purchased (Amarullah et al., 2022).
- **e-WoM Usefulness:** Electronic word of mouth usefulness is a subjective evaluation by the consumers through which decision- making skill for the purchase will be enhanced. An information is said to be useful if it helps in decision making process (David 1989). E-WOM has significant impact on individuals when they are evaluating their choices for a purchase (Jeong and Koo, 2015). Erkan and Evans (2016) stated that e-WoM usefulness leads to purchase intention of the consumers. As consumers will involve in information if they found it useful (Lee & Koo, 2015; Cheung 2014).
- **Trust:** Trust is the subjective perception of a person regarding the information that they believe to be trustworthy (Ho & Chien, 2010). Trust is basically a positive attitude of user towards a particular object which distinct it from the factors like risk and fear (Pavlon, 2014). Trust is developed when consumers think e-WoM on social media is reliable (De Matos & Rossi, 2008) and it also depends upon expertise of sender (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 2007). Several studies have been done where trust in e-WoM has led to purchase intention of the consumers

(Fan & Miao, 2012).

- **Valence:** Harrison-Walker (2001) in his study stated that there are two dimensions of WoM communication i.e., WoM activity and WoM praise. e-WoM communication could be positive as well as negative depending upon senders' expertise on the product. Electronic word of mouth would be positive if it includes pleasant description of products, while negative e-WoM would include complaints, dissatisfaction etc. Previously studies have linked e-WoM valence and purchase intention, where positively valance will influence purchase behavior of consumer (Bigne et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2012). Where positive e-WoM influences the purchase intention their negative reviews have also been proved to be more powerful (Salehi et al., 2016; Park&Lee, 2009). In addition to it studies have been done where positive and negative statements have been investigated by scholars but neutral or mixed statements have been given less importance (Duan et al., 2008; Sweeny et al., 2005). Consumers as per their level of satisfaction will spread the e-WoM. Customers whose expectation level is met will be highly satisfied and accordingly they will spread positive feedback. On the contrary consumer whose feel that the product purchased is below the standard will spread negative e-WoM. Dissatisfied consumers will have the emotion of regret, anger, resonance (Bonified &Cole, 2007). Dissatisfied consumer will vent his emotions by sharing his experience on social media with their friends and other people**.**
- **Volume:** Increasing social media platforms have enabled thousands of consumers to engage in e-WoM and share their opinions with potential consumers. Volume of e-WoM represents the quantity of information available to consumers regarding products on various digital platforms. More the information is available more the consumers will be confident in making the purchase decision, and more information also helps in creating awareness among the consumers about new products (Park & Konana, 2012). Here the theory of Herd behavior also applies as theory states that consumer selects products of popular brands more often. Therefore, a product will be more popular or best-selling if e-WoM is of high in volume.
- **Attitude towards website and product:** Attitude is describing as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, p.582). The attitude of a consumer towards a product will highly be determining factor in the purchase process. Researchers have asserted that the formation of attitude from e-WoM, coupled with

the subsequent purchase of a product, may also serve as a significant factor in influencing consumer purchase intentions. (Chih et al., 2013). Lee etal, (2011) in their research involving 104 respondents discovered that positive attitude towards a website leads to purchase intention of a product.

- **Tie Strength:** Tie strength "the robustness of the connections between members within a social network." (Mittal et al., 2008). Ties on social media can be strong and week, depending upon the bond one shares with others. Strong ties are with friends, relatives or family members or with people upon whom we emotionally depend. Weak ties are with colleagues, acquaintances, or strangers. The type of social tie can determine the influence of e-WoM will have on receiver There are few studies which state that strong ties have more power to influence purchaser intention, as strong ties are based on trust and with the ones whom we share similar interests (Wang & Chang, 2013). While other studies suggest that weak ties can impact purchase intent of consumers (Steffes & Burgee, 2009; Pigg & Crank, 2004).
- **Source Expertise:** Source expertise is other important aspect of e-WoM which shapes the inclination to acquire the product. Expertise is "the extent to which a source is perceived as being capable of providing correct information" (Briston 1990, p. 73). Expertise can be judged on the basis of the context in which e-WoM is shared, tenure of the reviewer on social media platform, active participation of reviewer in related products (Racherla & Friske, 2012). In a survey of 280 respondents, it was found that expertise of the sender affects the consumers' intention to buy the product (Zainel et al., 2017). The more the expertise will be reflected in e-WoM, higher will be the chances of the consumer to buy the product**.**

2.3.3 Motivation to send e-WoM

Motivation is delineated as the process that propels or initiates people to behave in a certain manner (Neumann, 2015). The need of motivation generally drives when a person is going through some kind of stress or tension and thereby, he lacks stability. To balance that stability person tries to set a goal in order to be stressed free (Heing Thurau et al., 2004). As per previous studies person is motivated to send e-WoM when he wants to vent out his/her feelings or by doing so he is getting some social or economic advantage. As per Cheungand Lee motivation to spread e-WoM mayinclude egoism, altruism, principals, collectivism. A motivation to spread e-WoM is

considered egoistic when an individual information for its own interests and benefits. Consumer here acts rationally, by expecting something in return for spreading word of mouth. Person seeks for return gifts, money, prize, acknowledgment etcetera. When group of people collectively tend to spread e-WoM for the benefit of specific group is termed as collectivism. People in this scenario feel motivated as by thinking it's their responsibility to help the other members of the group. With their resource they try to help other members of the group even when it is not that much required. Such people voluntarily spread e-WoM with the perspective that someone might need this information. Also, such persons not only help other consumers but also the companies' by voluntarily sharing their products or giving feedback to the company. Prior research has demonstrated altruism as important motive to post e-WoM. Mardhiyan et al., (2013) using the sample of more than 100 people analyzed the factors that influences consumers to disseminate negative word of mouth. The results indicated that altruism was one of the most influential factors to spread negative e-WoM as they did not want other patients to use the bad medical service

2.3.4 Motivation to receive e-WoM

A receiver is the person who is looking for the information so that he/she can make the purchase decision. There are several reasons that motivates the users to receive e-WoM like reduction of risk, information related to product, social benefit, time saving, and approval from society. Electronic word of mouth taking place on carious platforms help to reduce the perceived risk before purchasing the product or availing the service and also boosts the confidence of consumer by giving them information related to the usage of product (Bansal and Voyer, 2000). Prior studies have identified that the primary driving force behind purchasing new products is risk mitigation, a consequence of active participation in social media-driven Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM). Through e-WoM, individuals not only gain access to information about products and services but also benefit from improved options and recommendations for specific products. In line with this, Kim et al. (2011) conducted a study involving over 700 respondents. The results of the study confirmed that the most significant motivation for perusing online reviews was to minimize risks associated with purchases. Perceived risk is prevalent in the situations where consumers lack familiarity with the products (Hussain et al., 2020; Khammashand Griffiths, 2011, p. 82–87). On the other hand, there are also users who seeks for e-WoM so that they can find out the products that enjoy widespread

acceptance within society at a particular juncture. Likewise other motivational factor which drives consumers to look for e-WoM is time. In todays globalized economy there are number of options available in the market of particular product category. With a lot of alternatives and information it becomes difficult for consumer to select the right choice of the product or brand. Therefore e-WoM is a medium through which the consumers are able to finalize their product as it saves their time to search and evaluate (Hans, 2008). Also, consumers read e-WoM so that they can get information related to the usage of product which requires specialized knowledge. Engaging in e-WoM will not only access consumers to product usage but also the solutions of the problems related to the product.

2.4 Quality, Credibility, Valence and Homophily

In understanding the dynamics of e-WoM, it is crucial to dissect the elements that influence its creation and reception. Several key antecedents have been identified, shedding light on the intricacies of this phenomenon. Smith and Johnson (2018) conducted research indicating that messages originating from sources perceived as knowledgeable hold greater trust and influence over consumers. This emphasizes the critical role of source credibility in transmitting electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM). Trust stands as a pivotal factor in the adoption of e-WoM. Various studies consistently highlight that messages from credible sources wield a significant impact on consumer behavior (Brown & Reingen, 2019; Li & Lee, 2020). Trustworthiness encompasses traits like reliability, honesty, and competence, all contributing to the effectiveness of e-WoM. The quantity and outreach of e-WoM messages also play a crucial role in determining their impact. Research by Wang et al. (2017) demonstrated that messages with broader dissemination typically exert a more potent influence on consumer perceptions. Additionally, e-WoM volume has been associated with increased brand awareness and consideration (Luo & Zhang, 2019). The characteristics of the platform hosting e-WoM significantly influence its reception. Research by Chen and Brown (2018) highlighted that user- friendly interfaces, clear navigation, and interactive features enhance thecredibility and persuasiveness of e-WoM platforms. Studies have shown that messages with clear, concise, and pertinent information are apt to be trusted and acted upon by consumers (Gao & Bai, 2016; Liu et al., 2018). Additionally, the tone, language, and formatting of messages influence their persuasiveness.

In this study, we have meticulously selected and incorporated several crucial antecedents of e-WoM influence. These dimensions include credibility, homophily, quality, and

valence. Each of these factors contributes substantially in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors in response to electronic word-of-mouth communication. The credibility of e-WoM sources has been shown to be particularly influential. Wang and Sun (2010) found that individuals are inclined to trust e-WoM from sources they consider as credible. This contention finds support in the research of mithet al. (2012), who have highlighted that credibility of the source significantly affects consumer trust in e-WoM. Moreover, the expertise of the source is a crucial aspect of credibility. Studies by Du and Wagner (2006) and Flanagin and Metzger (2008) highlighted that accurate and reliable information in e-WoM messages significantly contributes to their credibility. Furthermore, the platform on which e-WOM is shared can impact its credibility. Lee and Lin (2005) revealed that consumers have varying levels of trust in e-WoM shared on different online platforms, emphasizing the importance of considering the context in which e-WoM is presented. Overall, these studies collectively affirm the substantial influence of credibility on e-WoM.

Homophily, a fundamental concept in social psychology, plays an integral part in the context of e-WoM. Pornpitakpan (2004) highlighted that individuals tend to trust information more when they perceive a similarity between themselves and the source. This sense of affinity creates a foundational basis for trust, as consumers believe that individuals with commonalities are more likely to provide reliable and relevant information. Moreover, Cheung and Thadani's study in 2012 reaffirmed the significance of homophily in trust formation within e-WoM interactions. Their research demonstrated that consumers exhibit a higher tendency to trust information shared by sources they perceive as similar to themselves. This finding aligns with the broader understanding of social influence, where individuals are more inclined to be influenced by those they perceive as similar or relatable (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Festinger, 1954). Furthermore, the impact of homophily extends beyond trust to influence various aspects of consumer behavior. Wang and Zhang (2012) elucidated that individuals are increasingly inclined to engage with and adopt recommendations from sources they perceive as similar to themselves. This suggests that homophily not only affects trust formation but also plays a role in driving consumer actions based on e-WoM (Wang & Zhang, 2012).

The quality of e-WoM information serves as a fundamental factor influencing consumer trust and decision-making processes. Extensive research in this domain has consistently emphasized its significance. Cheung and Thadani's study in 2012 reinforced that consumers are more inclined to trust e-WoM messages that are perceived as accurate,

reliable, and valuable. There is an indication that the perceived quality of the information exerts a pivotal influence in shaping consumer trust in e-WoM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Further support for this notion is found in the work of Wang and Sun (2010), who conducted an experimental study underscored that high-quality e-WoM messages have a more substantial influence on consumer perceptions and decisions. This suggests that consumers are discerning in evaluating the quality of e-WoM information and are more likely to place trust in messages that meet certain standards of accuracy and reliability (Wang & Sun, 2010).

Valence in e-WoM, referring to the sentiment of the information shared, is a critical factor influencing trust and subsequent consumer behavior (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Research consistently affirms the impact of valence, highlighting the persuasive power of positive information. Positive e-WoM messages tend to be more influential, as individuals are naturally inclined towards positive content (Zhang & Daugherty, 2019). This positivity bias stems from the human tendency to seek out and engage with favorable experiences. Moreover, studies by Smith et al. (2012) and Huang and Benyoucef (2013) have further emphasized the significance of valence in e-WoM. Positive valence is not only linked to enhance trust but also correlates with increased purchase intention and favorable consumer attitudes. Conversely, negative valence can have detrimental effects on trust and consumer perceptions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Zhang & Daugherty, 2019). Additionally, the study by Lee and Lin (2005) delves into valence within the context of e-service quality. They find that positive valence in e-WoM is closely associated with higher perceived service quality, further underlining the impact of valence on consumer evaluations. Positive valence tends to be more persuasive, leading to higher levels of trust and positive consumer perceptions. This positivity bias is supported by various studies that highlight the significance of valence in shaping consumer responses to e-WoM messages.

2.5 Brand Image (BI)

Brand Image (BI) stands as pivotal element in consumer psychology, encapsulating the intricate perceptions and connections that consumers forge with a brand (Keller, 1993). It encompasses a multifaceted construct that includes attributes, emotions, and experiences associated with the brand. BI holds a fundamental position in shaping consumer decision-making processes, influencing preferences, attitudes, and purchase intentions. The brand image significantly impacts brand credibility and reputation, serving as a foundation for consumers to determine their purchase decision (Wijaya, 2013). Electronic word of mouth and brand image allow companies to leverage social networking sites to comprehend these

variables. By doing so, businesses can develop enduring relationships between their brand and consumers (Farzin & Fattahi, 2018). Timely reviews shared on social platforms hold the potential to sway consumers' purchase decisions and contribute positively to an organization's brand image (Naimatullah, 2015). The influence of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM) on Brand Image (BI) is extensively studied, yielding valuable insights into this correlation. For instance, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) conducted a groundbreaking study on consumer- opinion platforms, highlighting their substantial role in shaping consumer perceptions and, consequently, brand image. Another study involving 211 participants concluded that various dimensions of e-WoM, namely quantity, quality, and credibility, wield a positive impact on both brand image and consumers' purchase intentions (Yu, 2019). Building on this, Smith et al. (2012) delved into user-generated content specifically related with the brand across social media platforms, revealing how content on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter can dynamically influence brand image and consumer perceptions. Similarly, Ha and Stoel (2009) explored consumer e-shopping acceptance and highlighted the substantial influence of online consumer opinions, a form of e-WoM, on brand image and subsequent consumer behavior. Moreover, Madhavaram and Badrinarayanan (2005) provided an integrated view of brand loyalty, showcasing how positive consumer opinions contribute to building brand loyalty, a construct intricately linked with brand image.

Moreover, Liao and Cheung (2002) conducted research on internet-based e-shopping and consumer attitudes, showcasing the persuasive capacity of electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM) in shaping consumer perceptions and, consequently, brand image. Collectively, these studies underscore the profound influence of e-WoM on brand image, emphasizing the critical role of consumer-generated content and opinions in the digital realm in shaping consumer behavior and brand perceptions. Cheung and Thadani (2012) conducted a comprehensive analysis of e-WoM's impact on consumer behavior, particularly emphasizing its influence on brand image and subsequent implications for consumer perceptions and behavior. Chakraborty & Bhat (2018) discovered that positive e-WoM experiences significantly augment hedonic brand image, reinforcing positive associations and perceptions linked with the brand. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) emphasized the engaged buyers' role in fostering positive e-WoM, which strengthens their connection with the brand and subsequently impacts brand image. Lee and Lin (2005) explored customer perceptions of e-service quality in online shopping, revealing how e-WoM can sway consumer attitudes and, in turn, brand image. Godes et al. (2005) delved into firms'

management of social engagements, offering insights into how companies can leverage e-WoM to enhance brand image and consumer relationships. Together, these studies affirm the multifaceted impact of e-WoM on brand image, highlighting its significance in contemporary consumer decision-making processes.

2.6 Value Co-Creation (VCC)

Value Co-Creation (VCC) embodies a collaborative system wherein consumers actively contribute to the creation and enhancement of product or service value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This notion is of substantial attention as businesses acknowledges the significance of involving consumers in value creation activities. e-WoM, as a powerful force in consumer decision-making, serves as a catalyst for Value Co- Creation. When consumers involve in electronic word-of-mouth activities, they not only share opinions and recommendations but also contribute valuable insights and ideas for improvement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This exchange of information and feedback fosters a collaborative environment between businesses and consumers, providing a platform for co-creating value. The framework for assessing the impact of e-WoM on Value Co-Creation involves several key dimensions. Firstly, it considers the volume and reach of e-WoM messages, as higher levels of engagement and dissemination indicate a greater potential for value co-creation (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Additionally, the credibility and trustworthiness of e-WoM sources play a crucial role in fostering collaborative value creation (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The quality and relevance of e-WoM content significantly impact the value co-creation process. High- quality information that offers meaningful insights or suggestions for improvement encourages greater participation from consumers (Wang & Sun, 2010). Finally, the sentiment or valence of e-WoM messages can influence the nature of value co-creation interactions. Positive sentiments could foster more constructive and collaborative exchanges, while negative sentiments may necessitate problem-solving and improvement efforts (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). One empirical study conducted by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explored the driving forces compelling consumers to engage in e-WoM activities. The findings indicated that consumers participate in e-WoM to share information and collectively augment knowledge for the enhancement of products and services. This demonstrates a clear association between e-WoM and value co-creation. Historically, considerable attention has been directed towards social platforms as channels for manufacturers to advertise and promote their products. However, relatively limited focus has been placed on the concept of value co-creation (Patrick et al., 2017). The impact of customer value co-creation intensifies notably when strong

social ties are present (Zadeh et al., 2019). An empirical study conducted by Yi and Gong (2017) uncovered that Customer Value Co- Creation comprises two dimensions: customer participation behavior and Customer Citizenship Behavior. Customer participation behavior involves actions such as seeking information, sharing information, and responsible behavior, while customer citizenship behavior encompasses providing feedback, advocating for products, offering assistance, and demonstrating tolerance.

Moreover, Huang and Benyoucef (2013) conducted a study scrutinizing the design features of e-commerce platforms and their role in facilitating value co-creation. The research highlighted that platforms fostering user-generated content and interactions create an environment conducive to collaborative value creation. Another empirical investigation by Smith et al. (2012) explored user-generated content related to brands across various social media platforms. The study revealed that consumers frequently engage in e-WoM to express their opinions and experiences regarding brands. This consumer-generated content contributes to shaping the collective perception of brand attributes and value. While these studies do not directly measure the impact of e-WoM on value co-creation, they offer valuable insights into consumer motivations and behaviors in online settings. These behaviors closely align with the concept of value co-creation, as consumers actively contribute to improving products or services throughtheir interactions and feedback.

2.7 Purchase Intention

“Purchase intention is a cornerstone in consumer behavior, representing an individual's preparedness and willingness to engage in a purchase” (Ajzen, 1991). This cognitive process is a pivotal precursor to actual buying behavior and is shaped by a diverse array of influencing factors (Asnawati et al., 2022). Chief among these are perceived value, brand perception, and the influence of recommendations from social circles and online communities (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Keller, 1993). Perceived value, an essential determinant of purchase intention, encapsulates the consumer's assessment of the overall worth and value they anticipate from a product or service in relation to its expense (Zeithaml, 1988). A favorable perception of value is a potent catalyst for purchase intention, as it instills confidence in the consumer that the acquisition will be beneficial and worthwhile.

Moreover, brand perception significantly molds purchase intention. Consumers form perceptions of brands based on their experiences, interactions, and the information they

encounter (Keller, 1993). A positive brand image, characterized by attributes like trustworthiness, quality, and reliability, can foster a strong inclination to purchase. Conversely, negative brand associations or experiences may deter consumers from proceeding with a purchase. The influence of recommendations, particularly in the digital age, cannot be overstated. Positive e-WoM experiences, including online reviews and recommendations, have been shown to significantly boost purchase intentions (Chen et al., 2022; Fernandes et al., 2022; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Consumers are inclined to place substantial trust in the perspective so their peers and online communities, valuing them as authentic and reliable sources of information. Understanding purchase intention is paramount for businesses in crafting effective marketing strategies and optimizing customer experiences. By recognizing the pivotal role of perceived value, brand perception, and e-WoM, companies can strategically influence and cater to the purchase intentions of their target audience (Handi et al., 2018).

The influence of electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM) on consumer purchase intentions is extensively documented in modern marketing research. Positive e-WoM, which includes consumer-generated content like reviews, recommendations, and testimonials shared on online platforms, holds considerable sway over consumer decision-making processes (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). This influence is rooted in the concept of social proof, where individuals tend to conform to the actions and opinions of others in uncertain or ambiguous situations (Cialdini, 2001). Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the positive correlation between favorable e-WoM and heightened purchase intentions. When consumers encounter glowing reviews or enthusiastic endorsements from fellow consumers, it triggers a psychological reassurance mechanism (Brown & Reingen, 1987). This assurance stems from the belief that if others have had positive experiences with a product or service, they are prone to enjoy similar benefits. Furthermore, the trust-building dynamics of e-WoM play a vital role in shaping purchase intention. Positive e-WoM from reputable sources or individuals with demonstrated expertise in a particular domain exerts a particularly potent effect on trust (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Additionally, the interactive and dynamic nature of e-WoM platforms intensifies their influence on purchase intentions. These platforms allow consumers to engage in real-time conversations, seek clarifications, and share experiences, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie among users (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). This communal engagement further reinforces the credibility and reliability of the e-WoM content, influencing consumers' confidence in their purchasing decisions. Hence, e-WoM's influence on

consumer purchase intentions is a multifaceted process driven by factors such as social proof, trust-building, and dynamic community interactions. As consumers increasingly turn to digital platforms for product information and recommendations, businesses stand to benefit by actively managing and leveraging e-WoM to enhance their brand perception and drive purchasing behavior.

Brand image and value co-creation are essential determinants of consumer purchase intentions, serving as intricate facets of the contemporary consumer decision-making process. A brand's image, shaped by consumer perceptions and associations, carries substantial weight in influencing purchase intentions (Keller, 1993). In essence, a strong and positive brand image fosters a sense of trust, reliability, and favorability among consumers, making them more inclined to consider the brand's offerings when making purchase decisions. Empirical research underscores the profound connection between brand image and purchase intentions. For instance, a study by Yoo and Donthu (2001) examined the effects of brand personality on consumer behavior and revealed that consumers often form emotional bonds with brands possessing favorable personalities, leading to heightened purchase intentions. This emotional connection, intricately intertwined with brand image, serves as a compelling motivator for consumers to act upon their intentions. Value co-creation complements the process by deepening consumer engagement and attachment to the brand. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) originated the pioneering notion of value co-creation, emphasizing the importance of consumers actively participating in brand-related activities. When consumer participate in the activities fostering value co- creation, encompassing providing feedback, contributing ideas, or participating in online communities, it strengthens their connection with the brand (Gummerus et al., 2012). This engagement fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment, reinforcing brand loyalty. Research by Payne, Storbacka, and Frow (2008) on the co-creation of value in the service context highlights how collaborative efforts between consumers and brands result in enhanced service experiences and, consequently, increased purchase intentions. As consumers actively engage in co-creating the value, they perceive the brand as more responsive and attuned to their needs, further solidifying their purchase intentions. Moreover, the interaction between brand image and value co- creation creates a synergy that augments consumer purchase intentions. A positive brand image enhances the receptivity of consumers to actively partake in value co-creation process (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). In return, active participation in value co-creation deepens the emotional connection with the brand, reinforcing the positive brand image. To sum up, the intricate

interplay between brand image, value co-creation, and consumer purchase intentions illuminates the multifaceted nature of contemporary consumer decision-making. Businesses that recognize and actively nurture these relationships stand to benefit by not only bolstering their brand's image but also by driving consumer purchase intentions in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

2.8 Integrated Model: e-WoM, Brand Image, Value Co-Creation, and Purchase Intention

The integrated model that encompasses electronic word of mouth, brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention represents a comprehensive framework for comprehending the intricate dynamics of consumer behavior in the contemporary era. This model synthesizes key elements that collectively shape consumer decision- making processes. Electronic word of mouth serves as a catalyst in this model, representing the digital evolution of traditional word-of-mouth, whereby consumers share opinions, recommendations, and experiences in digital realm (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). It has emerged as a powerful force in influencing consumer perceptions and choices. Brand Image, a cornerstone in consumer psychology and marketing, plays a crucial part in shaping consumer preferences and attitudes towards products or services (Keller, 1993). It encompasses the associations, perceptions, and emotions evoked by a brand in the minds of consumers. Value co-Creation introduces a participatory dimension, emphasizing the enthusiastic engagement of consumers in enhancing the creation of a value or product or service (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This collaborative effort between consumers and brands has become increasingly significant in contemporary marketing. Purchase Intention, a central construct in consumer behavior, encapsulates the consumer's inclination and readiness to make a purchase (Ajzen, 1991). It is a critical precursor to actual purchasing behavior and is influenced by various factors, including perceived value, brand image, and recommendations from others. The integrated model seeks to elucidate the nuanced interplay among these components, fostering a holistic comprehension of how e-WoM, brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention collectively influence consumer behavior in the digital era.

2.8.1 Synergies between e-WoM, Brand Image, Value Co-Creation, and Purchase Intention

The synergies between electronic word of mouth, brand image, value co- creation, and purchase intention form a dynamic interplay that shapes consumer behavior in thedigital landscape. Electronic word of mouth has emerged as a transformative force in

contemporary consumer behavior. It transcends geographical boundaries, allowing individuals to express their viewpoints and share personal experiences on a global scale. This phenomenonis facilitated by various digital platforms, including social media, review platforms, and online forums (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The availability and outreach of e-WoM have redefined how consumers explore and exchange information regarding products and services. Studies have consistently showcased the significant impact of e-WoM on consumer preferences. Positive e-WoM experiences have been shown to lead to increased purchase intentions and sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Consumers tend to trust recommendations and reviews from their peers or other consumers, valuing them as authentic and unbiased sources of information. Furthermore, e-WoM introduces an element of social influence into the consumer decision-making process. Social influence theory posits that people are inherently susceptible to the actions and opinions of their peers (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). In the context of e-WoM, this means that when consumers encounter recommendations or endorsements from their social network, they are more inclined to be swayed in their purchasing decisions. The emergence of e-WoM has also given rise to the phenomenon of online communities. These digital forums serve as hubs of interaction where consumers come together to exchange information, seek advice, and share experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Within these communities, collective wisdom significantly influences purchasing decisions. Consumers turn to these platforms to seek validation, gather insights, and make informed choices based on the experiences of others. Brand Image,a foundational concept in marketing and consumer psychology, holds substantial influence over consumer preferences and behavior. It represents the overall perception that consumers have about a brand, encapsulating their beliefs, feelings, and experiences associated with it (Keller, 1993). This multifaceted construct goes beyond tangible product features, extending to intangible elements like brand personality, values, and overall brand identity. Research has consistently showcased the fundamental significance of brand image in consumer decision-making. Studies have shown that a positive brand image leads to increased brand loyalty, preference, and advocacy (Keller, 1993). When consumers have favorable associations with a brand, they are more likely to choose it over competitors, even in the presence of similar offerings. Moreover, brand image assumes a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions of product quality and value. Consumers often use brand image as a heuristic or shortcut to assess the expected performance and benefits of a product (Keller, 1993). A strong brand image can lead to a perception of higher quality, which, in turn, influences purchase decisions. Brand image

also influences consumer emotions and attachment to a brand. Emotional connection theory suggests that consumers naturally cultivate affective ties with brands that resonate with their values and aspirations (Thomson et al., 2005). When image of the brand aligns with the consumer's self-perception or desired lifestyle, it fosters a deeper emotional connection. Value Co- Creation, a transformative concept in contemporary marketing, revolutionizes the traditional producer-consumer relationship. It advocates for an inclusive approach where consumers actively participate in the creation and enhancement of product or service value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This shift from a passive consumer role to an active co- creator not only empowers consumers but also strengthens their connection with the brand. Research has highlighted the profound impact of value co-creation on consumer- brand relationships. Studies have shown that consumers who engage in co-creation activities tend to have higher levels of brand loyalty and advocacy (Hoyer et al., 2010). By involving consumers in the value creation process, brands foster a sense of ownership and attachment, leading to deeper and more meaningful connections. Furthermore, value co-creation has been found to enhance consumer satisfaction and perceived value. When consumers are actively involved in shaping the product or service, it leads to a sense of personalization and customization, resulting in higher satisfaction levels (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This, in turn, influences their perception of the value offered by the brand. Value co-creation also facilitates the generation of innovative ideas and solutions. Consumers, as end-users, often possess valuable insights and perspectives that can lead to product improvements and innovations (Füller et al., 2009). By tapping into this collective intelligence, brands can stay attuned to market demands and remain competitive. Purchase Intention, a pivotal construct in consumer behavior, serves as a strong indicator of an individual's inclination and readiness to purchase (Ajzen, 1991). It encapsulates the psychological state where a consumer has progressed beyond mere consideration and is poised to engage in a transaction. This intention is shaped by a multitude of factors, including perceived value, brand image, and the influence of external recommendations. Empirical studies have underscored the significance of perceived value in shaping purchase intentions. When consumers perceive a product or service as offering providing a significant value relative to its cost, their intention to make a purchase is heightened (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991). This perception of value is influenced by various elements, including product quality, price, and the benefits derived from the offering. Additionally, brand image exerts a substantial impact on purchase intentions. A positive brand image, characterized by favorable associations and perceptions, instills trust and

confidence in consumers (Keller, 1993). Consumers are more inclined to express an intention to purchase from brands they view positively, as this perception is closely linked to their trust in the brand's ability to deliver on its promises. Moreover, the impact of recommendations and interpersonal engagements on purchase intentions is noteworthy. Positive word of mouth, whether from peers, family, or online communities, has been shown to significantly enhance purchase intentions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Consumers tend to invest a significant degree of trust in the experiences and opinions of others, and this trust translates into a greater likelihood of intending to make a purchase.

Indeed, the interplay between e-WoM, brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention is a dynamic and intertwined process that significantly shapes consumer behavior. Positive e-WoM experiences not only boosts the enhancement of brand image (Laroche et al., 2012) but also serve as a catalyst for value co-creation. Engaged consumers, as they actively participate in co-creating value with the brand, are more inclined to convey positive instances through e-WoM channels (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This creates a positive feedback loop where engaged consumers further contribute to positive e-WoM, reinforcing the brand's image. As a result of these interconnected processes, consumers are inclined to exhibit a heightened purchase intention. When they perceive a brand positively through e-WoM interactions and observe the active efforts of the brand in collaboratively creating value, they become inclined to make a purchase (Ajzen, 1991). This intention to purchase is not isolated but is influenced by the cumulative effect of positive interactions with the brand. These synergies emphasize the collective influence of e-wom, brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention in guiding consumer behavior. It highlights the importance of holistic and integrated marketing strategies that recognize the interdependence of these components. By understanding how these elements work together, businesses can formulate more effective and impactful marketing initiatives that resonate with their target audience.

2.8.2 Proposed Framework for Understanding the Combined Influence

The Proposed Research Model: Impact of e-WoM on purchase intention through brand image and value co-creation represents a comprehensive framework that encapsulates the intricate relationships between e-WoM, brand image, value co-creation, and their collective impact on consumer behavior. This model is designed to offer a systematic and holistic perspective for understanding how these key components interact and influence consumers' intentions to make a purchase. At its core, the proposed framework acknowledges the significance that e-WoM holds in the contemporary consumer decision

making process. In an era dominated by digital connectivity and information sharing, e-WoM has emerged as a potent force that shapes brand perceptions and consumer preferences. By synthesizing insights from established theories such as Social Influence Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this framework aims to unravel the underlying mechanisms through which e-WoM exerts its influence. Furthermore, the model places a significant emphasis on the mediating roles of brand image and value co-creation. It posits that positive e-WoM experiences contribute to the enhancement of brand image, influencing how consumers perceive and engage with a brand. Additionally, the participatory nature of value co- creation is integral, as it not only strengthens consumer- brand relationships but also serves as a catalyst for positive e-WoM interactions. This dynamic interplay between e-WoM, brand image, and value co-creation ultimately impacts consumers' intentions for the purchase.

The proposed research model thus provides a structured and comprehensive framework for examining the collective influence of these key components on consumer behavior. By delineating the intricate relationships and mediating mechanisms, this model (as shown in figure 2.1) strives to facilitate a profound exploration of the complex dynamics at play in the digital age of marketing. The proposed research model: impact of e-WoM on purchase intention through brand image and value co-creation presents a comprehensive framework that seeks to illuminate the interplay between electronic word of mouth (e-WoM), brand image, value co-creation, and their collective influence on consumer behavior. This model draws on established theories and empirical evidence to provide a structured understanding of these key components.

At its core, the model recognizes significance of e-WoM in shaping consumer perspectives and preferences (Laroche et al., 2012). In today's digitally connected world, e-WoM has emerged as a dominant force in influencing consumer decision-making. This is consistent with Social Influence Theory, which emphasizes the significant impact of social interactions and recommendations on individual choices (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). The proposed research model posits that positive e-WoM experiences contribute to the enhancement of brand image, thereby influencing how consumers perceive and engage with a brand (Laroche et al., 2012). Furthermore, the model underscores the importance of value co-creation, which involves consumers actively engaging in the creation and enhancement of product or service value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This participatory approach empowers consumers and fosters a deeper connection with the brand. The model suggests that engaged consumers not only strengthen their connection

with the brand through value co- creation but also contribute to positive e-WoM interactions (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This model corresponds with well-established theoretical frameworks such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which provides a subtle insight of how people process and react to persuasive messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). It discerns between central and peripheral approaches to persuasion, shedding light on how e-WoM messages are received and internalized by different segments of the audience.

The proposed research model encompasses a comprehensive examination of the influence of e-WoM on consumer behavior, focusing specifically on smartphone brands. At its core, research endeavors to provide insight on how e-WoM shapes consumer perceptions and purchase intentions, with the mediation of brand image and value co- creation. These objectives are grounded in well-established theories and empirical research within the realm of consumer behavior and digital marketing.

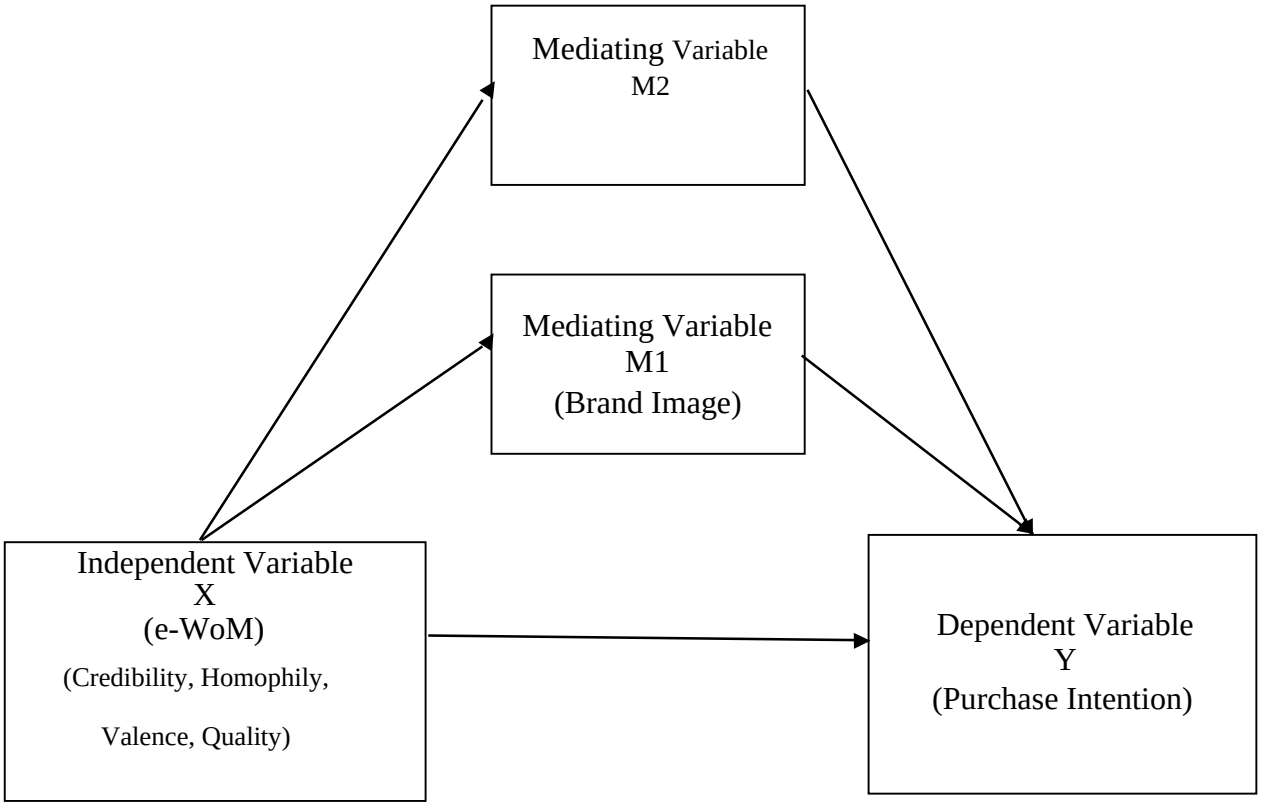


Figure 2.1: Proposed Research Model

First and foremost, the study aims to investigate the effect of e-WoM on consumers' purchase intentions regarding smartphone brands. Numerous studies have highlighted the considerable impact of e-WoM on consumer purchasing decisions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Positive e-WoM experiences have been consistently shown to enhance the

probability of consumers intending to make a purchase, emphasizing the importance of e-WoM as a driving force in consumer behavior. In tandem with assessing the impact on purchase intentions, the research model aims to analyse the intricate link between e-WoM and brand image. Moreover, brand image encapsulates the associations and perceptions consumers hold about a brand, and it is known to be influenced by consumer reviews and recommendations (Laroche et al., 2012). The model posits that e-WoM contributes significantly to the formation and enhancement of brand image, as positive e-WoM experiences lead to the development of favorable brand associations.

Furthermore, the study explores the collaborative dimension of e-WoM by investigating how it shapes consumers contribution in co-creating the value. Value co-creation emphasizes the vigorous involvement of consumers in co-creating and enhancement of product or service value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Engaged consumers who participate in e-WoM activities not only strengthen their connection with the brand but also contribute to positive e-WoM, fostering value co- creation. Finally, the research model examines how o brand image and value co-creation act as mediators in the relationship between e-WoM and purchase intention. Building on existing literature (Keller, 1993; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), it suggests that brand image and value co-creation act as intermediaries in influencing consumer purchase intentions, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. All in all, this research model represents a holistic approach to investigating the complex interplay between e-WoM, brand image, value co-creation, and consumer behavior concerning smartphone brands. By achieving these objectives, the research endeavors to offer valuable insightful contributions to the field, with potential implications for digital marketing tactics and consumer engagement in the digitalized era. In brief, the proposed research model integrates insights from Social Influence Theory, Value Co-Creation Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model to elucidate the complex relationships between e-WoM, brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention. By providing a structured framework, this model aims to advance our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in contemporary consumer behavior.

2.9 Methodological Approaches in Studying e-WoM Influence

This section critically evaluates the methodological landscape, drawing on established research paradigms and innovative techniques, to elucidate the diverse tools available for investigating e-WoM influence. Through a synthesis of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches, researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted

nature of e-WoM dynamics. Quantitative methodologies stand as a cornerstone in e-WoM research, employing statistical techniques to examine large- scale datasets and draw generalizable conclusions (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). By leveraging statistical analyses such as regression models or structural equation modeling (SEM), researchers can delineate the causal relationships and predictive power of e-WoM variables on constructs like brand image, value co- creation, and purchase intention. Qualitative approaches offer a complementary lens, delving into the nuanced intricacies of consumer experiences and narratives surrounding e-WoM (Smith & Sparks, 2009). Methods like comprehensive interviews, focus groups, and content analysis enables the researchers to unearth rich qualitative insights. In recent years, mixed-method approaches have gained prominence, recognizing the value of combining quantitative rigor with qualitative depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). By integrating surveys or experiments with in-depth interviews or content analysis, researchers can triangulate findings, providing a more comprehensive and robust understanding of e-WoM influence. This methodological synergy allows for a holistic exploration of the interplay between numerical trends and the underlying human experiences that underpin e-WoM dynamics. Experimental designs offer yet another avenue for researchers to probe causal relationships in e-WoM influence (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). By manipulating variables in controlled settings, experiments enable researchers to isolate specific factors and observe their direct impact on consumer responses. This approach provides a rigorous platform for testing hypotheses and establishing causal links between e-WoM exposure and subsequent consumer behavior. Observational studies, on the other hand, provide opportunities for researchers to witness natural consumer behavior in real-world digital environments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). By monitoring online interactions, comments, and reviews, researchers can gain valuable insights into the spontaneous reactions and decision-making processes of consumers exposed to e-WoM.

In summation, this section explores the diverse methodological approaches available to researchers in the study of e-WoM influence. By leveraging quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, experimental, and observational methodologies, researchers can construct a comprehensive understanding of the intricate mechanisms through which e-WoM shapes consumer perceptions, behaviors, and decisions. This methodological diversity is crucial in uncovering the nuanced dynamics of e-WoM influence and offers a foundation for evidence-based marketing strategies in the digital era.

2.9.1 Research Designs and Methodologies Employed in Previous Studies

1) Survey-Based Research:

Survey-based research has been a cornerstone in understanding e-WoM dynamics. To illustrate, in their investigation on online consumer review, Dellarocas et al. (2007) employed surveys to gather data on consumer behavior and response to e-WoM. Similarly, Sashi (2012) utilized surveys to investigate consumer attitudes towards brand-related e-WoM in social media. Further studies have harnessed the power of surveys to explore various aspects of e-WoM. By employing structured questionnaires, Forman et al. (2008) explored how review characteristics influence consumers' trust in e-WoM. The research conducted by Park et al. (2007) examined how e-WoM affects consumers' intention to purchase through online book reviews via surveys. Similar survey-based studies have been crucial in understanding e-WoM's role in specific industries. For instance, in the hospitality sector, Ye et al. (2009) used surveys to investigate e-WoM's influence on hotel booking intentions. In the field of e-commerce, Kim and Srivastava (2007) utilized surveys to explore consumer perspectives on e-WoM in online shopping. Surveys have also delved into cultural variations in e-WoM behavior. Cheung et al. (2018) compared e-WoM's impact on consumer purchase decisions across diverse cultural contexts using surveys. Huang et al. (2016) employed surveys to understand the factors influencing e-WoM adoption among Chinese consumers. Within healthcare, surveys have been instrumental in understanding patient perspectives on e-WoM. Lee et al. (2013) examined how online health information influences patient decision-making through surveys. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2014) used surveys to comprehend the impact of e-WoM on patients' trust in medical information within health-related online communities. Studies such as Filieri (2015), Ghose and Ipeirotis (2007), Kim and Kim (2017), Lee et al. (2008), Li et al. (2014), Mudambi and Schuff (2010), Racherla and Friske (2012), Sparks and Browning (2011), Wang et al. (2002), and Ye et al. (2011) employed survey-based research to explore various aspects of e-WoM's impact on consumer behavior, trust, decision-making, and preferences across different industries and contexts.

These surveys collectively demonstrate the diverse applications of survey-based research methods in examining various facets of e-WoM and its influence on consumer behavior and decision-making processes in multiple domains.

2) Experimental Studies:

Experimental studies represent a robust methodological approach in the realm of e-WoM research. These studies are characterized by their controlled environments, where

researchers have the ability to manipulate specific variables. Wang and Sun (2010) carried out an experimental study to observe the effects of e-WoM on consumer behavior. By systematically varying different aspects of e-WoM content and analyzing how these variations influenced consumer responses, they were able to draw clear causal connections. This level of control and precision is characteristic of experimental research and provides a rigorous foundation for drawing conclusions about the impact of e-WoM. Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) employed a similar experimental approach to investigate how e-WoM contributes to fostering trust of consumers. Through carefully designed experiments, they could isolate the impact of electronic word-of-mouth from other potential factors, allowing them to draw specific conclusions about its impact on trust. Godes et al. (2005) analysed how firms manage social interactions, potentially involving controlled experiments to understand consumer behavior in these contexts. Ha and Stoel (2009) examine consumer acceptance of e-shopping using a Technology Acceptance Model, which may incorporate experimental elements in assessing user responses to e- commerce interfaces. Huang and Benyoucef's study (2013) explore the transition to social commerce and investigates design features, possibly including experiments to evaluate their impact. Lee and Lin (2005) focus on consumers perceive e-service quality in the realm of shopping from virtual stores, potentially utilizing controlled scenarios to assess how e-service quality variations influence perceptions. Liao and Cheung'swork (2002) on internet-based e-shopping and consumer attitudes might involve experimental techniques to evaluate how different aspects of e-shopping interfaces or processes affect consumer attitudes.

Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) undertake a meta-analysis of studies on the origin country in research, synthesizing findings that may include experiments that investigate the influence of cues related to the origin of country. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) presented the notion of trust within the realm of tourism and travel, which may encompass research using experimental designs to investigate trust- building mechanisms in tourism settings.

3) **Qualitative Research:**

Qualitative research constitutes an essential methodological approach in understanding the intricate nuances of consumer behavior. It places emphasis on delving into the depth of experiences, attitudes, and behaviors through techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and content analysis. This approach aims to uncover the underlying motivations, sentiments, and narratives that may not be readily apparent through quantitative methods alone. An illustrative example of this approach can be found in Bone's study conducted in 1995. Bone employed qualitative interviews as a means to gain rich insights into consumer motivations

for actively engaging in e-WoM platforms. By means of open-ended discussions and probing questions, Bone sought to unearth the subjective perspectives and personal experiences that shape consumer behavior in the digital realm. This qualitative exploration likely offered a detailed understanding of the diverse array of factors influencing consumer participation in e-WoM, which may not have been captured as comprehensively through quantitative surveys or experiments. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) conducted qualitative research delving into the motivation behind consumer engagement on e-WoM platforms. Through qualitative interviews, the researchers gained valuable insights into the motivations and experiences that drive e-WoM behavior. Smith et al. (2012) employed qualitative content analysis to investigate user-generated content related to brands across diverse online platforms. The study revealed variances in the nature and tone of brand-related discussions across platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Rozier Rich & Mishra (2018) used qualitative content analysis to understand customer engagement with brands on Twitter. By analyzing brand-related tweets, the researchers explored how factors like brand anthropomorphism and credibility influence customer engagement and electronic word-of-mouth. Wang & Fesenmaier (2004) conducted qualitative interviews to explore the notion of trust within the realm of tourism and travel. Through qualitative exploration of travelers' perceptions and experiences, the study granted a deeper insight into the factors contributing to trust in the tourism industry. Schouten & McAlexander (1995) employed ethnographic qualitative research methods to understand the subculture of "new bikers." Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, the researchers gained insights into the consumption patterns and lifestyle of this group. Walsh et al. (2009) utilized qualitative interviews to investigate consumer perceptions and attributions regarding corporate brand alliances. Through in- depth conversations with consumers, the study provided qualitative insights into how consumers perceive and make attributions about brand partnerships. Du & Wagner (2006) used qualitative interviews to explore the use of weblogs (blogs) for learning purposes. By qualitatively examining the experiences and perceptions of blog users, the researchers gained insights into how weblogs are utilized as a learning tool. Flanagin & Metzger (2008) conducted qualitative content analysis to examine the credibility of volunteered geographic information (VGI) shared on online platforms. Through content analysis of user- contributed geographic information, the researchers assessed the aspects that stimulate the perceived credibility of VGI. Laroche et al. (2013) used qualitative interviews to investigate the influence of social media on brand loyalty. By conducting in-depth interviews with consumers, the researchers gained

qualitative insights into how social media engagement influences brand loyalty.

4) Content Analysis:

Content analysis, another prevalent method, involves the systematic examination of textual or visual content from e-WoM platforms to derive insights (Neuendorf, 2017). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) utilized content analysis to scrutinize the characteristics of e-WoM messages, offering valuable insights into the nature of online word-of-mouth. Their systematic examination of the content allowed them to attain a more profound comprehension of the messages shared by consumers in online contexts. Through systematic investigation of e-WoM messages, the researchers got the better understanding on how consumer views and recommendations shared online influence consumer behavior. This method enabled them to examine the content of e-WoM messages in a structured and systematic manner, providing valuable insights into its effects. Content analysis has also been applied to explore consumer-generated advertising on platforms like YouTube. Lee and Youn (2009) used content analysis to systematically examine video content and user comments, gaining insights into how consumers engage with advertising content on the platform. By analyzing the textual and visual content shared by users, the researchers were able to uncover patterns and trends in consumer-generated advertising. Smith et al. (2012) applied qualitative content analysis. This approach allowed them to compare and analyze the nature of content shared by users on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Through their systematic analysis, they identified differences in the tone and characteristics of brand- related discussions across these platforms. Walsh, Hennig- Thurau, and Mitchell (2009) utilized content analysis to investigate consumer perceptions and attributions regarding corporate brand alliances. Through in-depth conversations with consumers, the researchers gained qualitative insights into how consumers perceive and make attributions about brand partnerships. This method provided them with a structured approach to analyze consumer discussions and opinions related to brand alliances.

5) Case Studies:

Case studies provide a unique perspective, allowing for a thorough analysis of a specific phenomenon within a designated setting (Yin, 2018). Smith and Smith (2016) analyzed a case study focused on e-WoM in the fashion industry, providing a detailed examination of how consumer-generated content influences brand perceptions and purchase intentions in this sector. In another notable case study, Chen and Chen (2017) explored the dynamics of e-WoM within the context of mobile apps. Their thorough analysis provide insightful revelations into the factors that foster the success and embrace the use of mobile

applications, revealing crucial insights for marketers and developers in this fast-evolving digital landscape. Furthermore, Thompson and Lougheed (2019) conducted a case study within the healthcare sector, specifically focusing on patient- generated reviews and feedback. This study not only offered insights into the impact of e-WoM on healthcare provider choices but also highlighted the importance of managing online reputation in sensitive industries. In a distinct context, Johnson and Wang (2018) undertook a case study to comprehend the significance of e-WoM in the hospitality industry. By scrutinizing consumer reviews and ratings, they provided a comprehensive view of how online opinions influence consumer decisions and choices when it comes to accommodation options. Turning attention to the realm of online marketplaces, Brown and Jones (2015) conducted a case study centered on e-WoM within the framework of electronic commerce platforms. Their study focused on factors that influence consumer trust and purchase decisions within online marketplaces, offering critical insights for businesses operating in this space. In a case study focusing on the travel industry, Wong and Ye (2019) explored the impact of e-WoM on destination choices. Through a detailed examination of online travel reviews and recommendations, they provided valuable insights into the factors that influence travelers' decisions when selecting destinations.

In the education sector, Case and Case (2016) conducted a case study to understand how e-WoM influences student enrollment decisions. By examining online discussions and reviews, they gained insights into the information sources that prospective students rely on and how it impacts their choices. Their research shed light on the factors that influence consumer trust and willingness to adopt new payment technologies. Within the context of consumer electronics, Zhang and Zhang (2017) conducted a case study to investigate how e-WoM influences purchasing decisions. By examining online forums and discussions, they offered valuable perspectives on the factors that drive consumer preferences and choices in the consumer electronics market. Wang and Wang (2018) undertook an in-depth case study to elucidate the impact of e-WoM on consumer choices. Their research provided detailed insights into how online reviews and recommendations influence consumer decisions when ordering food online.

6) Longitudinal Studies:

Longitudinal studies, involving the tracking of changes or developments over an extended period of time, are instrumental in understanding trends and shifts in e-WoM dynamics (Bryman, 2016). De Vries et al. (2012) employed a longitudinal study to analyze the evolution of e-WoM over several years, providing valuable insights into its changing

landscape. By tracking changes over an extended period, they provided invaluable perspectives on the evolving landscape of e-WoM and its effect on consumer-brand interactions. Similarly, Liu, Li, and Hu (2013) focused on the sentiment trends and influential factors shaping e-WoM conversations over time. Through this longitudinal lens, they were able to discern patterns in consumer behavior and identify key drivers of e-WoM activity on social media. In another notable longitudinal study, Sun, Rui, and Whinston (2013) investigated the influence of e-WoM on platforms driven by content generated by users. By tracking the trajectory of e-WoM interactions over an extended period, the researchers gained a comprehensive understanding of the evolving patterns in consumer-generated content. Furthermore, research conducted by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) exemplifies the power of longitudinal analysis in understanding the impact of e-WoM on purchase decisions. Through a longitudinal study design, they assessed the exposure to e-WoM on sale of products over an extended period. A longitudinal study conducted by Zhang, Filieri, and Lin (2018) explored the function of e-WoM within the realm of online brand communities. By tracking interactions and content over time, this longitudinal perspective allowed them to uncover patterns of engagement and information dissemination among community members. In a study by Berger and Schwartz (2011), a longitudinal approach was employed to examine the virality of online content, which includes e-WoM. By tracking the sharing patterns of online content over time, the researchers identified key factors that contribute to the spread of information through e-WoM. This longitudinal perspective shed light on the enduring impact of e-WoM on information diffusion. Similarly, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2013) utilized a longitudinal research design to explore the effects of e-WoM on customer loyalty in the context of social media. By tracking consumer interactions and brand-related discussions over an extended period, the researchers gained insights into the enduring effects of e-WoM on consumer-brand relationships. Moreover, a longitudinal study by Li and Kannan (2014) examined the impact of e-WoM on product sales in online marketplaces. Through an extended analysis of e-WoM interactions and sales data, the researchers uncovered patterns of consumer behavior and purchasing decisions influenced by e-WoM. In a research endeavor conducted by Sen and Lerman (2007), a longitudinal approach was employed to understand the dynamics of product adoption through e-WoM. By tracking the spread of product-related information over time, the researchers gained insights into the factors that drive consumer adoption of products based on e-WoM recommendations. This longitudinal perspective provided a comprehensive view of the product adoption process.

Lastly, a longitudinal study conducted by Dellarocas, Zhang, and Awad (2007) concentrated on the impact of e-WoM on sales of books in online platforms. Through an extended analysis of e-WoM interactions and sales data, the researchers identified the mechanisms through which e-WoM influences consumer purchasing decisions over time.

7) Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis, a method that examines the structure and interactions within online social networks, has emerged as a powerful tool in understanding the spread and influence of e-WoM messages (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Cheung and Lee (2012) used social network analysis to study the dissemination patterns of e-WoM messages, shedding light on the mechanisms underlying their reach and impact. Furthermore, Liang, Choi, and Joppe (2009) conducted a comprehensive examination of social connections to evaluate the dynamics of information flow in online travel communities. Their study provided a detailed understanding of how information is shared and disseminated among members, shedding light on the key influencers within these networks. This analytical approach allowed the researchers to identify pivotal nodes and bridge connectors that play a crucial role in shaping e-WoM within travel communities. By examining the connections between users and the patterns of information dissemination, their study offered valuable insights into the flow of e-WoM within these digital spaces. The research highlighted the pivotal role of influential users in amplifying the reach and impact of e-WoM messages. Moreover, Hossain, Dwivedi, and Rana (2015) conducted a social network analysis to examine the relationships between consumers and their interactions on e-commerce platforms, the study unveiled the pathways through which e-WoM impacts consumer behavior. In a distinct context, Yang, Mai, and Khoo (2018) employed social network analysis to study e-WoM within the context of political discourse on Twitter. Their study analyzed the patterns of information dissemination and the formation of opinion clusters within the political discourse on the platform. This approach allowed the researchers to discern the influential actors and communities that drive e-WoM in the realm of political discussion. Their study focused on understanding the relationships between reviewers and the patterns of review sharing. Through this analytical lens, the researchers gained insights into the mechanisms that govern the dissemination of e-WoM within online review platforms. These diverse methodological approaches collectively contribute to the multifaceted understanding of e-WoM dynamics, offering researchers a rich toolkit to investigate its impact on consumer behavior and decision-making.

2.10 Identifying Gaps

Many previous studies on e-WoM have provided valuable insights into general consumer behavior. Nevertheless, there exits gap in the existing body of literature concerning how e-WoM specifically influences consumer behavior within niche markets, such as the smartphone industry (Smith & Coyle, 2015). A systematic literature review was conducted using Scopus.com with the keywords "smartphones, social media platforms, e-WoM, purchase intention", this allowed us to identify the research gap. Thoughthere is an extensive body of research on e-WoM, there is a gap in understanding how different social media platforms contribute to e-WoM dynamics. Focusing on a specific platform, such as Instagram, can contribute to more sophisticated grasp of e-WoM behavior (Smith et al., 2012). Prior research has examined the immediate influence of e-WoM on consumer behavior. However, there is a gap in research that explores the mediating factors, such as brand image and value co-creation, which may play a significant role in molding consumer responses to e-WoM (Cheung& Thadani, 2012). The proposed study addresses these gaps in previous research in several ways: Firstly, by focusing specifically on the smartphone industry, this study explores a niche market. This approach acknowledges that consumer behaviors and decision-making processes may vary significantly when it comes to purchasing smartphones, as compared to other product categories. Furthermore, the choice of Instagram as the primary platform of investigation recognizes the importance of platform-specific dynamics in e-WoM behavior. Different digital platforms may foster distinct types of interactions and conversations, and present research aims to uncover the unique dynamics of e-WoM on Instagram. Lastly, the proposed research model integrates mediating factors like brand image and value co-creation. This is a significant step towards understanding the complex interplay between e-WoM and consumer behavior. By considering these mediating factors, the study endeavors to offer a more comprehensive perspective of how e-WoM influences purchase intention. To conclude, the current study seeks to address the identified gaps in previous research by focusing on a niche market, examining platform-specific dynamics, and integrating mediating factors. By doing so, it seeks enhance more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how e-WoM influences consumer behavior in the context of smartphone brands globally.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology chapter is a pivotal component of this study, as it outlines the systematic framework employed to gather, analyse, and interpret data. It serves as the foundation upon which the entire research endeavor rests, guiding the path towards meaningful insights and conclusions. This chapter delineates the chosen research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques, providing a clear roadmap for addressing the research objectives. This chapter ensure the credibility and rigor of the study by providing by providing a meticulous account of methodology, thereby ensuring that the findings can be reliably interpreted and contribute meaningfully to the current state of knowledge.

3.1 OBJECTIVES OF THESTUDY

Research objectives or problems are the statements that researcher intends to accomplish within a period of time. There is an old saying "a problem well defined is half solved" which rightly fits in the research work. If the research problem is not comprehensive it will give misleading conclusions and results. For the present study research objectives are well framed on the basis of research gap derived from extensive literature review from indexed journals. The objectives of the study are outlined as follows:

1. To examine the effect of e-WoM on Purchase Intention of consumers for Smartphone brands.
2. To assess the influence of e-WoM on Brand Image.
3. To examine the influence of e-WoM on Value Co-Creation by consumers.
4. To examine the mediating effect of Brand image and Value Co-Creation with respect to Purchase Intention

3.2 NEED AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The exponential growth of online user base has propelled the phenomenon of electronic word of mouth (e-WoM). Prior to making purchase decisions, consumers engage in discussions about products or services on various online platforms, instilling confidence in their choices (Yang, Cheng & Tong, 2015). This transformation from traditional word of mouth to e-WoM, facilitated by digitalization, has evolved into a pivotal tool for cost-effective business promotion and advertising (Macdonald, 2019). Scholars have

demonstrated that e-WoM holds more influence in product information acquisition compared to conventional forms of advertising (Yang, Cheng & Tong, 2015). The shared content and experiences of consumers wield significant power in shaping purchase decisions (Macdonald, 2019). Social media platforms not only raise brand awareness but also foster direct communication between consumers and marketers, redefining brand-consumer interactions (Halfez, 2021). Given the ubiquity of smartphone usage and the potent force of e-WoM, it is imperative for smartphone marketers to comprehensively understand its impact on consumer purchase behavior (Yang, Cheng & Tong, 2015). This study adds to the theoretical framework by integrating previous word of mouth theories and explores how e-WoM influences smartphone purchase intentions (Yang, Cheng & Tong, 2015). Additionally, it delves into the antecedents of e-WoM within the smartphone industry, further enriching existing literature (Yang, Cheng & Tong, 2015). The study also sheds light on brand image and value co-creation, elucidating how both marketers and customers can collaborate to enhance products through e-WoM (Halfez, 2021). Examining these dynamics on platforms like Instagram underscores the significance of customer engagement in such environments (Halfez, 2021).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design provides a structured framework for carrying out the study effectively (Vaus, 2006). It is imperative to have a well-structured research design ensuring the smooth execution of various research methods, maximizing efficiency in the process. Within the framework of this study, the research design was tailored to see the influence of e-WoM on consumers purchasing intentions towards smartphone brands. The chosen approach was the quantitative descriptive research method, widely recognized and extensively utilized in research endeavors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Initially, the study employed a descriptive research method to explore the relationships between variables, engage in hypothesis testing, and generate new ideas. The primary aim was to ascertain if the variables were systematically interconnected in predicting future occurrences. Descriptive analysis serves to uncover generalizable characteristics pertinent to the current situation. To meet the research objectives, a representative sampling approach was employed. Sample selected was reflective of the population, enabling the findings to be extrapolated to the broader population. The overarching role other research design was to guarantee that the collected data would yield logical and unambiguous answers to the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.4 SAMPLING DESIGN

A sample design holds paramount importance in the research process as it furnishes a specific blueprint for acquiring a sample from the population under investigation. This design encompasses the techniques or procedures that a researcher employs when selecting elements for the sample, ensuring that each element or respondent possesses a known probability of inclusion (Bryman, 2016). The choice of sampling approach in a study can significantly impact its validity, reliability, and the ability to derive accurate conclusions about the population (Kothari, 2004). Consequently, it is imperative for researchers to meticulously deliberate on the sample design to ascertain the success of the study.

3.4.1 TARGET POPULATION

The population encompasses individuals who actively follow smartphone brands on Instagram. Instagram, founded in 2010, has swiftly ascended as among the fastest- growing social media platforms, showcasing a staggering user base of over 2 billion (Kepios, 2022). Notably, in the wake of the Indian government's ban on TikTok, Instagram has witnessed a substantial surge in users (Kepios, 2022). As of the latest data available, Instagram stands out as one of the most favored social media platforms, with Facebook closely following suit, according to a report by GW1 in 2022. Meta, the parent company of Instagram, reports a remarkable 21% increase in ad reach, now reaching a billion users monthly. Particularly noteworthy is the platform's capability to engage with approximately 600 million individuals through Instagram reels. Users dedicate an average of 30 minutes daily to perusing Instagram, with a striking 81% utilizing the platform for product and service research (Christina Newberry, 2021). The survey further reveals that 65% of marketers consider Instagram an integral component of their brand's social strategy (Jackson, 2020). This burgeoning user base and active engagement on Instagram signify its pivotal role as a platform for consumers to explore and discuss smartphone brands, rendering it an ideal focus for this study.

3.4.2 PRODUCT CATEGORY

Evaluating the authenticity of online reviews hinges significantly on the determination of the product category (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). This study specifically focuses on smartphones, which fall under the consumer electronics category. Smartphones were chosen due to their diverse and distinctive features, making them one of the most extensively reviewed product categories globally (Chan & Ngai, 2011). As of Statista's 2023 report, an astonishing 85% of the world's population, totaling 6.92 billion individuals, own smartphones. The growth of smartphone users has been nothing short of remarkable, with numbers surging by nearly 50% from 2017 to 2022. Kepios' 2022 report further highlights that the growth of internet users has more than doubled since 2012, skyrocketing from2.15 billion to 4.95 billion users in 2022. Moreover, the mobile market made a substantial contribution of5% to the global GDP in 2021. According to Kepios, individuals now spend an average of 6 hours and 58 minutes daily to internet usage. Presently, approximately 57% of the population accesses the internet via smartphones, a figure projected to rise to 72% by 2025, as reported by the World Advertising Research Center. Additionally, the global 5G smartphone market is anticipated to experience a staggering Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 94%, generating a revenue of $13,633,254 million. Studies indicate that the adoption of fifth-generation networks has outpaced that of previous generations. Given the unprecedented popularity of smartphones and their pervasive influence, this product category serves as an apt focal point for the present study.

From the multitude of smartphone brands available worldwide, this study focuses exclusively on the top five global brands: Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, Oppo, and Vivo. This selection is rooted in data provided by Counterpoint Research (2023), ensuring that the chosen brands hold significant prominence in the smartphone market. Consequently, respondents for this study will be drawn from Instagram users who follow these top five smartphone brands: Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, Oppo, and Vivo. This strategic selection aims to capture insights from a substantial and diverse segment of the smartphone consumer base, allowing for a comprehensive analysis.

3.4.3 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE & SAMPLE SIZE

To gather data for the current study, a purposive or convenience sampling approach categorized as non-probability sampling method has been utilized. It is often impractical

to survey the entire population to answer research questions, as it can be costly and challenging to gain access to all potential participants. Thus, a representative sample size has been selected to minimize cost and time while still providing reliable results (Babbie, 2016). Purposive or convenience sampling, a non-random sampling approach, entails the selection of participants based on specific criteria that align with the research question. This method is commonly used when the researcher has limited resources or when the population is difficult to access. Although this method has its limitations, it can provide valuable insights into the research topic (Guest et al., 2012).

Selecting an appropriate sample size is a pivotal decision in any study, as it ensures the representation of the entire population. While non-probability sampling methods don't adhere to strict rules for sample size determination, several researchers have proposed their own guidelines. For instance, when conducting factor analysis, it is recommended to have a minimum of 100 respondents. For Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a commonly recommended guideline is to have a sample size determined by tenfold multiplication of the number of variables. Kliv (2015) advises a sample size of 200 for SEM, while Hair et al. (2017) argue that each variable should have a minimum of 10 responses for SEM. Given that this study encompasses 38 variables, following this guideline would necessitate a sample size of at least 380. Additionally, adhering to the "Rosce rule of thumb,"which suggests a sample size of at least 30 and ideally 500 or more, is considered essential for conducting robust research. In this study, a sample size of 800 has been chosen, surpassing the 500-mark, thus ensuring a comprehensive and reliable dataset for analysis. This decision is well-founded and aligns with established recommendations in the field.

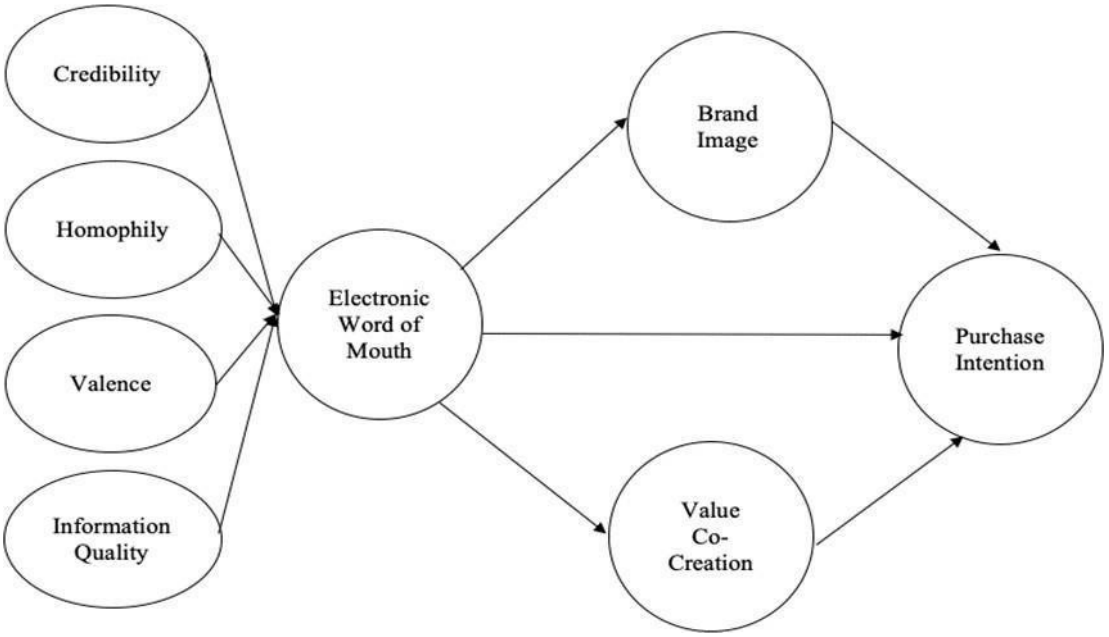
3.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The conceptual framework of this study aims to examine the relationship between e-WoM, Brand Image, Value Co-Creation and Purchase Intention. The study encompasses several key constructs in the context of electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) on Instagram pages and its influence on consumer behavior towards smartphone brands. Credibility, measuring the trustworthiness of e-WoM information, is anticipated to positively affect its impact. Homophily, gauging the influence of like-minded individuals, is expected to amplify the effect of e-WoM. Valence, indicating the sentiment of e-WoM content, particularly positive valence, is presumed to hold a stronger sway on consumer behavior. The quality of information shared in e-WoM, encompassing relevance, completeness,

and accuracy, is also anticipated to bolster its impact. E-WoM itself, influenced by credibility, homophily, valence, and information quality, forms the core of the study. It is predicted to significantly shape brand image, representing consumers' overall perception of specific smartphone brands based on e-WoM. Moreover, it is expected to influence value co- creation, signifying collaborative value generation among consumers and smartphone brands, as well as purchase intention. Brand image is further envisaged to mediate the relationship between e-WoM and purchase intention, with a positive brand image bolstering purchase likelihood. Similarly, value co-creation is projected to mediate the link between e-WoM and purchase intention, with positive value co- creation heightening purchase likelihood. This comprehensive framework lays the foundation for a nuanced exploration of consumer behavior influenced by e-WoM on Instagram pages.

Drawing on previous research, credibility, homophily, valence, and the quality of information has been recognized as critical determinants of e-WoM impact (Wang, 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2016; Rani & Shivaprasad, 2019). Additionally, studies have shown that e-WoM significantly affects brand image and value co-creation, with positive e-WoM enhancing brand image perception (Kim & Gupta, 2012; Rani et al., 2021) and value co-creation activities (Davis & Khazanchi, 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Moreover, the mediating roles of brand image and value co-creation in the relationship between e-WoM and purchase intentions have been explored in previous literature (Zhang et al., 2010; Amblee & Bui, 2011; Jalivand et al., 2012; Seeto & Ho, 2014; Torlak et al., 2014; Kala & Chaubey, 2018). This comprehensive model builds on these insights to provide a holistic understanding of the intricate dynamics within the realm of e-WoM and consumer behavior on Instagram.

Figure 3.1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



3.6 FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESIS

As per the study's objectives, several hypotheses were formulated. As shown in Table 3.1, these hypotheses were based on the dimensions that the study was developed with. The hypotheses outlined in the study propose a series of relationships between the key constructs. Firstly, it's hypothesized that the credibility of electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) content, as perceived by consumers, will have a direct influence on e-WoM itself. If consumers find the e-WoM content credible, it's expected to positively impact their engagement in e-WoM activities. Similarly, the concept of homophily, which refers to the inclination of individuals to be influenced by those who possess akin characteristics or interests, is believed to directly affect e-WoM. This implies that if consumers discern a degree of similarity with others in the e-WoM community, they are more prone to involve themselves in e-WoM activities.

Table 3.1: Dimensions and Hypothesis

Dimensions	Hypothesis
Credibility and e-WoM	*H1:* The credibility of e-WoM information on Instagram positively influences e-WoM adoption
Homophily and e-WoM	*H2:* Homophily in e-WoM information on Instagram positively influences e-WoM adoption among consumers
Information of Quality and e-WoM	*H3:* Quality of e-WoM information on Instagram positively influences e-WoM adoption among consumers
Valence and e-WoM	*H4:* Valence of e-WoM information on Instagram positively influences e-WoM adoption among consumers
e-WoM and Brand Image	*H5:* e-WoM positively influences Brand Image
e-WoM and Value Co-creation	*H6:* e-WoM positively influences Value Co-Creation
e-WoM and Purchase intention	*H7:* e-WoM positively influences Purchase Intentions of Consumers
Brand Image and Purchase intention	*H8:* Brand Image positively influences Purchase Intentions of Consumers
Value Co-creation and Purchase intention	*H9:* Value Co-Creation positively influences Consumers' Purchase Intentions
e-WoM, BI and PI	*H10:* The relationship between e-WoM and consumer purchase intentions is mediated by brand image
e-WoM, VC and PI	*H11:* The relationship between e-WoM and consumer purchase intentions is mediated by value co-creation

Moreover, the quality of information in e-WoM is anticipated to directly influence consumers' participation in e-WoM. If consumers find the information shared to be relevant, complete, and accurate, they are prone to get involved in e-WoM discussions. Additionally, the valence, or the positive or negative sentiment of the e-WoM content, is expected to directly impact consumers' involvement in e-WoM. If the content is positively valenced, it's predicted to exert a stronger influence on consumers' e-WoM activities. Moving beyond the impact of e-WoM, the study suggests that e-WoM itself is a substantial predictor of both brand image and value co-creation. This implies that consumers' perceptions of smartphone brands and their collaborative efforts with the

brand are influenced by e-WoM. Moreover, e-WoM is expected to have a direct influence on consumers' purchase intention, indicating that it plays a pivotal role in shaping consumers' likelihood to buy a smartphone brand.

Additionally, it's hypothesized that both brand image and value co-creation mediate the relationship between e-WoM and purchase Intention. This means that the effect of e-WoM on consumers' likelihood to purchase a smartphone brand is partially explained by their perceptions of the brand's image and their collaborative efforts with the brand. This comprehensive set of hypotheses forms the backbone of the study, providing a clear framework to comprehend the intricate relationships between these key constructs in the context of e-WoM and consumer behavior towards smartphone brands.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Given that this study aims to gather quantitative data from a sizable respondent pool, the use of self-administered questionnaires emerged as the most fitting method. This choice aligns with the recommendation of Saunders et al. (2012), who advocate for questionnaires as the preferred tool for collecting data from large sample sizes. Notably, this method is not only well-suited for the current study but also proves to be both cost-effective and time-efficient (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Additionally, questionnaires are acknowledged for their convenience, benefiting both the researcher and the respondent (Gray, 2014). It is worth emphasizing that the design of the questionnaire carries significant weight, as it directly impacts the validity of responses and overall response rates (Saunders et al., 2012). Bryman & Bell (2011) provide valuable recommendations for crafting questionnaires to enhance response rates. These include ensuring that the questionnaire: i) provides clear instructions and outlines the purpose of data collection, ii) features concise and avoids overly lengthy questions, and iii) is engaging to respondents. In adopting these guidelines, this study ensures that the questionnaire serves as an effective tool for gathering pertinent data.

3.7.1 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The process of questionnaire development wields significant influence on the research journey, as it directly impacts the response rate of the targeted audience. Adhering to the guidelines outlined by Bryman & Bell (2011), a meticulously crafted questionnaire was devised in the present study. It primarily revolves around the acquisition of first- hand data through a combination of multiple-choice questions and other relevant

inquiries. The measurement scale employed in this study adopts an "adopted approach" derived from existing literature, with necessary modifications made to align with the study's specific objectives. Rigorous expert reviews were conducted, and the scale's reliability and validity were meticulously assessed.

A comprehensive review of extant literature was undertaken to ensure each construct was measured in the most effective manner. In cases where a latent construct couldn't be directly gauged, it was assessed throughone or more related variables. To augmentboth the reliability and validity of measurements, a multi-item approach was embraced, entailing the assessment of each construct through multiple items. The chosen measurement utilized a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," where 1 represented "strongly disagree," 2 meant "disagree," 3 stood for "neutral," 4 indicated "agree," and 5 signified "strongly agree." Additionally, the questionnaire encompassed both positively and negatively framed statements, strategically integrated to gauge respondent attentiveness. Thus, the questionnaire is meticulously tailored to solicit insights from consumers who turn to e-WoM on Instagram when making informed decisions about their smartphone purchases, and to ascertain its influence on brand image and value co-creation endeavors.

The questionnaire is structured with three distinct parts, each aimed at collecting specific information related to the study on the influence of electronic word of mouth(e-WoM) on purchase intention through brand image and value co-creation in the context of smartphone brands on Instagram. Some initial questions were also asked to the respondents:

1. Do you use Instagram to review smartphones before making the final purchase?
2. Do you read posts/ view story/ like, comment, or share post of smartphone brands on Instagram?

Respondents who answered “yes” to any of the above questions were eligible to continue contributing in the survey.

Part A: Demographic Profile

It serves to gather background information of the consumers. It includes questions about their name, age, gender, qualification, occupation, monthly household income, usage of social media platforms, favored social media platform, smartphone

brand preferences, preferred method of smartphone purchase, frequency of smartphone change, and the weekly time devoted to internet.

Part B: Measuring Electronic Word of Mouth (homophily, credibility, quality, valence)

This section delves into the respondents' perspectives on e-WoM on Instagram. It includes questions that ask respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement with statements regarding the credibility, homophily, valence, and quality of the information shared on Instagram pages of smartphone brands. The purpose is to gauge how respondents perceive and engage with e-WoM content.

Part C: Measuring Impact of e-WoM on Purchase Intention through Brand Image and Value Co-Creation

This section is dedicated to assessing the impact of e-WoM on brand image and its consequential effect on purchase intention. It involves evaluating statements that gauge respondents' perceptions regarding how e-WoM influences brand image and, consequently, their intentions to make purchases. Furthermore, this section aims to see the willingness of respondents to engage in value co-creation activities with the brand specifically on Instagram.

All in all, the questionnaire is designed with a mix of closed-ended questions using various rating scales (Likert scale) and multiple-choice questions. The demographic section provides context and allows for the segmentation of responses based on different demographic factors. The second section dives into the respondents' perceptions of e-WoM, while the third section aims to understand how this influences their attitudes towards the brand and purchase decisions. The questions are clear, concise, and structured in a logical flow, ensuring that respondents can easily comprehend and respond to them.

Table 3.2: Operationalization and Measurement of Variables

S. No.	Name of the Variables	Adapted From
1.	Credibility	Erkan & Evans 2016
2.	Homophily	Hussain et al., (2016)
3.	Valence	Barari, Ross & Surachartkumtonkun (2020)
4.	Quality Of Information	Hussain et al., (2016)
5	e-WoM	Jalivand & Samiei. (2012)
6	Brand Image	Chakraborty & Bhat (2018)
7.	Value Co-Creation	Camacho, Vazquez & Silva (2015)
8.	Purchase Intention	Jalivand & Samiei. (2012)

Table 3.2 outlines the operationalization and measurement of the key variables in the context of this study.

Credibility: This variable pertains to the trustworthiness and reliability of the information shared on Instagram pages of smartphone brands. It draws on prior study by (Erkan & Evans 2016). In the context of this study, credibility of information assesses how users perceive the information shared on Instagram pages of smartphone brands. This is crucial as it influences their attitudes and behaviors towards the brand.

Homophily: This variable is about the tendency of individuals to trust and rely on reviews and recommendations from others who share similar characteristics or interests. It is adapted from study by Hussain et al., (2016). In this study, homophily explores whether users are more inclined to consider reviews from others who share similar demographics or interests, which can significantly impact their decision-making process.

Valence: Valence refers to the positivity or negativity of the information or reviews available on Instagram pages of smartphone brands. It draws from research by), Barari, Ross & Surachartkumtonkun (2020). This variable investigates how the sentiment or tone ofreviews influences users' perceptions.

Quality of Information: This variable assesses thecomprehensiveness, relevance, and up-

to-datedness of the information shared on Instagram pages of smartphone brands. It is derived from studies by Hussain et al., (2016). The quality of information gauges the degree to which users find the content informative and helpful in making informed decisions about smartphone purchases.

e-WoM: Electronic Word of Mouth(e-WoM) represents the digital exchange of opinions, experiences, and recommendations among consumers, particularly on social media platforms like Instagram. It is adapted from study by Jalivand & Samiei. (2012). This variable examines how users engage with and respond to e-WoM on Instagram pages of smartphone brands, which is pivotal in influencing their perceptions and actions.

Brand Image: It is the overall perception and impression that users have about specific smartphone brands. It is drawn from research by Chakraborty & Bhat (2018). Understanding brand image is crucial as it shapes users' preferences and attitudes towards particular smartphone brands.

Value Co-Creation: Value Co-Creation involves the collaboration of both consumer and brand collectively contribute to creating value. It is sourced from study by Camacho, Vazquez & Silva (2015). In this study, value co-creation explores how users engage with smartphone brands on Instagram to collectively enhance the value they receive from the brand.

Purchase Intentions: This variable pertains to users' inclinations or likelihood to buy smartphones. It is adapted from studies by Jalivand & Samiei. (2012). Understanding purchase intentions is critical as it directly influences actual buying behavior. These variables collectively form the framework of the study, enabling a comprehensive examination of the influence of e-WoM on brand perceptions, value co- creation, and ultimately, purchase intentions in the context of smartphone brands on Instagram.

3.7.2 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The questionnaire underwent a meticulous validation process involving seven respected academicians and five seasoned professionals. Among the academicians, four were affiliated with the university, while the remaining three hailed from diverse academic institutions. Based on the feedback received from these experts, several adjustments were made to the questionnaire. Some questions were simplified, and others were rephrased to enhance clarity and effectiveness. The refined questionnaire, as used in the study, can be found in the annexure. The questionnaire was validated by academicians and marketing

professionals to check face or content validity and then it was revised as per the experts' suggestions

Table 3.3: CONTENT RELIABILTY

S.No.	Name of Expert/Designation/ Organisation	Suggestions	Action Taken
1	Dr. K. Prabhakar, Professor Central University, Jammu	The questionnaire is good. To a large extent it reflects the objectives.	NA
2	Dr Devesh Birwal Assistant Professor Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi	Proof reading is required. Sentence framing to be done as per the construct of the entire questionnaire	Suggestion accepted; sentences have been reframed
3	Dr. Pretty Bhalla Associate Professor Lovely Professional University, Phagwara	Change the language of first item of VCC. Good framework created.	Item no 1 of VCC has been modified as per the suggestion
4	Dr. Preeti Mehra Associate Professor Lovely Professional University, Phagwara	Construct VCC has been validated. To make few changes in demographic questions and modify statement no 16	Statement has been revised as per the suggestion received
5	Dr Pawan Associate Professor Lovely Professional University, Phagwara	The construct VCC has been validated.	NA
6	Dr. Richa Bhatia Lovely Professional University, Phagwara	Repetition in the statements of Purchase Intention	Statements with same meaning were omitted
7	Siddhartha Dev Assistant Marketing Manager Atomberg	All the items of the questionnaire match with its objectives. First question of VCC to be looked upon	The first statement of VCC was first incorporated but was later on deleted as per the suggestions by the expert

8	Manpreet Singh Consern Pharma DY Manager PMT	Satisfactory	NA
9	Rishika Sharma Outreach monks Content Strategist	Questionnaire is good, statements of VCC can be simplified.	Suggestion accepted, items of VCC have been simplified.
10	Nisha Kumari Photon Infotech Project Manager	All the items meet the requirements of the study	NA
11	Rangan Datta Photon Infotech Associate Project Manager	To delete the statement no1 of VCC	The statement has been deleted

To assess the instrument's internal consistency and reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed. As per the guideline outlined by George and Mallery (2011), a Cronbach's alpha value exceeding 0.9 signifies excellent consistency, 0.8 is considered good, and 0.7 is deemed acceptable. Conversely, a value of 0.6 is regarded as questionable, while anything below 0.5 is considered poor and unsuitable for use. During the pilot study, all Cronbach's alpha values fell well within the acceptable range, reaffirming the reliability of the constructs. This rigorous validation process ensures the reliability and validity of the questionnaire's constructs, instilling confidence in their effectiveness for the final data collection phase.

3.7.3 PILOT SURVEY

Pilot testing, often likened to a dress rehearsal or a small-scale test flight, serves as a crucial preparatory phase to ensure the smooth execution of the main study. It's primary purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of the research questions before the final data collection phase. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), this phase is instrumental in uncovering any challenges respondents might face, such as difficulty in understanding certain statements or unclear instructions within the questionnaire. Insights gained from pilot testing enable researchers to refine the questionnaire, ultimately enhancing its reliability and validity (Saunders et al., 2012).

Selecting an appropriate sample size for pilot testing is a critical decision. Cooper and Schindler (2011) suggest a range of 25 to 100 participants, while Isaac and Michael

(1995) and Hill (1998) propose a sample size between 10 and 30. Hertzog (2008) recommends 20 to 25 for a pilot study, and up to 40 if group comparisons are a study objective. On the other hand, some scholars advocate for a sample size equivalent to 10% of the total respondents selected for the main study (Treece & Treece, 1982; Lackey & Wingate, 1998). In alignment with these recommendations, a sample size of 80, constituting 10% of the total respondents, was chosen for the pilot testing phase in this study. This ensures a thorough evaluation of the questionnaire's effectiveness in capturing the intended data.

3.7.4 DATA COLLECTION

Following the meticulous pilot study, where the questionnaire underwent rigorous testing and refinement, the finalized version was then disseminated to a carefully selected pool of 830 targeted respondents. These individuals were chosen to represent a diverse cross-section of the population relevant to our research objectives. Their participation played a pivotal role in fine-tuning the questionnaire, ensuring that it was clear, concise, and effectively captured the necessary data. The dedication of our respondents was evident, as we received completed questionnaires from 797 participants, reflecting a commendable response rate. This robust dataset, comprising 797 respondents, forms the cornerstone of our study, providing a substantial foundation upon which we can confidently base our conclusions and insights. This substantial sample size bolsters the validity and applicability of our findings, lending additional credence to the outcomes of our research.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The primary data was imported into MS-Excel and subsequently loaded into both SPSS (V.23) and Smart PLS-4.3 for comprehensive examination. The objective was to scrutinize the interrelationships and distinctions between the various variables, thereby elucidating the connections among dependent and independent variables. This analytical endeavor encompassed a range of statistical techniques, including descriptive analysis, reliability assessment, frequency distributions, and t-tests.

3.8.1 FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

Frequency distribution is a valuable statistical tool utilized in this study to scrutinize the distribution of responses across various categories of a variable. Specifically, it was leveraged to acquire a comprehensive insight into the demographic profile of the participants. By employing frequency distribution, we were able to discern the precise number of respondents falling within each category of these demographic parameters.

For instance, in the case of age, it revealed how many respondents were grouped within specific age brackets. Similarly, for gender, it delineated the count of male and female respondents. The outcomes of this frequency distribution analysis were meticulously documented in the study. This, in turn, facilitated the formulation of well-founded conclusions drawn from the dataset. Furthermore, the application of frequency distribution served as a potent tool for uncovering potential patterns or trends within the data.

3.8.2 MEAN

In the realm of statistics, the mean serves as a vital measure of central tendency, often referred to as the arithmetic average. Its computation involves the summation of all values within a dataset, followed by dividing the sum by the overall count of observations. In the context of this study, the mean was instrumental in determining the average age of the respondents, along with computing average values for other key demographic factors.

3.8.3 STANDARD DEVIATION

It provides a measure of how the data points deviate from the average. In the context of this study, standard deviation was employed to scrutinize the variability present in the demographic data of the respondents. It was calculated for each demographic variable individually, providing insight into how much the responses deviated from the mean. A higher standard deviation indicated greater variability in the responses.

3.8.4 T-Test

In this study, t-tests were applied as a statistical tool to assess whether significant mean differences existed between various demographic groups. This approach allowed us to investigate if factors such as gender had a notable impact on variables. This analysis provided valuable insights into how demographic attributes influenced consumer behavior and perceptions.

3.8.5 One Way ANOVA

ANOVA (analysis of variance) was employed to analyse variations among different demographic groups. Specifically, it was used to assess if there were noteworthy distinctions in demographic variables like age, income, and education levels across various respondent groups. For example, ANOVA allowed us to explore if there were significant age differences or income disparities among different segments of respondents. This analysis was instrumental in understanding how these demographic characteristics may influence perceptions and behaviours related to smartphone brands on Instagram.

3.8.6 Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM)

This is particularly useful when there are multiple interdependent constructs and when the focus is on prediction and explanation. In this study, PLS-SEM was employed to analyse the structural relationships between the variables in the research model. Specifically, it was used to examine the causal links between electronic word of mouth (e-WoM), brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention. Through the application of PLS-SEM, this study successfully gave a robust analysis of the complex interplay between these key variables in the context of smartphone brands and Instagram. Smart PLS (4.3) was used to implement Structural Equation Model. Smart PLS (4.3) is a powerful software tool that enables researchers to conduct structural equation modelling and analyse the relationships between latent variables. Measurement Model Assessment

3.8.6.1 Composite Reliability

Reliability pertains to the consistency and stability of results derived from a research instrument or test. In this study, the reliability of the research instrument and its factors was evaluated using Composite Reliability (CR), a statistical measure of internal consistency reliability (Chin, 1998). Unlike Cronbach's alpha, CR does not assume equal error or loading terms among instrument items, making it a more preferred measure of reliability (Raykov, 2004). A CR value surpassing 0.7 is considered acceptable, indicating that the indicators effectively depict the constructs (Chin, 1998; Guo, Yiu & González, 2016). Hence, a minimum threshold of 0.7 for composite reliability was applied in this study to ensure that the indicators accurately represented the constructs in the measurement model (Chin, 1998).

3.8.6.2 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity, a vital facet of construct validity, assesses how accurately a measure captures the intended construct by examining the connection between observed variables or items in a scale and the underlying latent construct. It essentially gauges whether the items on the scale effectively measure the same underlying construct. In this study, the assessment of convergent validity was conducted through an analysis of loading factors and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS (4.3). Loading factors indicate the relationship between each observed variable and its corresponding latent construct. As proposed by Hair et al. (2010), standardized loading values above 0.7 suggest that the observed variable is a reliable indicator of the latent construct. AVE reflects the shared variance between observed variables and the latent construct. An AVE value exceeding 0.5 indicates that the latent construct accounts for a significant portion of the variance in observed variables, validating convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Upon assessing loading factors and AVE values in this study, it is evident that the observed variables or items on the scale exhibit substantial shared variance and serve as robust indicators of the latent construct they represent. This robust evidence strongly supports the convergent validity of the measurement instrument.

3.8.6.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity, an essential aspect of construct validity, ensures that a measurement instrument effectively captures a particular construct and distinguishes it from others. In this study, the assessment of discriminant validity for the latent variables followed the criteria outlined by Hair et al. (2010) and Fornell & Larcker (1981). Specifically, it involved comparing the square root of AVE (Average Variance Extracted)

for each construct with the correlations between that construct and the other constructs in the model. A construct is considered to exhibit discriminant validity if the square root of its AVE value is greater than the correlation it shares with other constructs in the model. This approach guards against measurement overlaps and confirms that the instrument accurately captures its intended construct without undue influence from other factors.

3.8.7 Structural Model Assessment

3.8.7.1 Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The Coefficient of Determination (R2) is a statistical metric utilized to assess the degree to which the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables in the model (Hair et al., 2017). In this study, R2 values were calculated to evaluate the predictive capability of the structural model concerning the dependent latent constructs. According to Chin (2020), the interpretive thresholds for R2 effectiveness can vary across research domains. A value equal to or exceeding 0.67 is considered substantial, a range between 0.33 and 0.67 is regarded as moderate, and a value of 0.19 or lower is categorized as weak. Therefore, in this study, the R2 values were compared against these benchmarks to determine the strength of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

3.8.7.2 Predictive Relevance(Q2)

Predictive relevance (Q2) is a vital metric for evaluating a model's forecasting capabilities, signifying how accurately the model can anticipate the future behavior of a latent construct. Q2 assesses the precision of the model's predictions by contrasting the projected values of the dependent latent variable against the actual values obtained through a blindfolding procedure. When Q2 exceeds zero, it signifies that the model holds predictive relevance. Conversely, a negative value suggests that the model lacks utility in prediction tasks. Chin (1998) advocates for a threshold of 0.2 for Q2 values to be deemed substantial, indicating that the model exhibits meaningful predictive relevance. Conversely, a Q2 value below 0.2 implies that the model's predictive power is lacking and may require refinement.

3.8.7.3 Effect size (f2)

Effect size serves as a critical measure for determining the practical significance of a statistical finding. In the domain of structural equation modeling (SEM) and regression

analysis, the f2 measure is utilized to quantify effect size, providing insights into how much variance in the dependent variable is accounted for by an independent variable or a set of them. The formula for calculating f2 involves dividing R2 (effect size of an independent variable) by (1 - R2) for the full model (effect size of the model). As per Cohen (1988), an f2 value of 0.02 represents a small effect size, while values of 0.15 and 0.35 indicate medium and large effect sizes, respectively. In the context of this study, employing f2 facilitates understanding the magnitude of impact each independent variable has on the dependent variable, purchase intentions. Additionally, it enables an assessment of the overall effect size of the model.

3.9 TECHNIQUES USED IN PLS-SEM

3.9.1 Bootstrapping

In this study, the examination of the hypotheses derived from the structural model included analyzing the sizes and significance of the path coefficients. To determine the significance levels of these coefficients, a bootstrapping procedure was employed following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2006). This procedure utilized 2000 bootstrap samples and 300 bootstrap cases without sign changes. It's worth noting that this method is deemed more robust and precise compared to conventional approaches like maximum likelihood estimation and ordinary least squares. This is especially relevant in situations where the sample size is restricted or the data distribution deviates from normality, as highlighted by Chin (1998).

3.9.2 Blindfolding

Blindfolding is a technique utilized to assess the predictive capacity of a PLS-SEM model. It involves excluding a subset of indicators during the model estimation phase and subsequently employing these omitted indicators to predict the construct scores. The model's predictive performance is then evaluated by comparing the actual construct scores with the predicted scores from the excluded indicators, using the cross-validated redundancy (Q2) criterion. The Q2 value represents the proportion of variance in the criterion variable that can be accurately foreseen by the predictor variables within the model.

In this study, blindfolding was conducted to measure the predictive relevance of the model. This process was carried out using the Smart PLS software, employing a 10- fold cross-validation and ensuring a minimum of 10 observations per fold. The Q2 value was utilized to gauge the model's predictive relevance, where Q2 values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 indicate

small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively (Chin, 1998).

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the current study contributes by exploring the intricate dynamics of consumer behavior within the sphere of digital word-of-mouth (E-WoM) on Instagram, nonetheless there are some limitations which can be addressed by researchers in forthcoming studies.

- Firstly, the study primarily focuses on certain specific product category. While this approach allows for in-depth analysis within a defined context, it may limit the applicability of the results to extensive range of products or industries. Different product categories may exhibit varying consumer behaviors in response to e-WoM, potentially yielding divergent results. Therefore, carefully consideration is required when extending the findings to other product categories.
- Secondly, the research design adopts a cross-sectional nature. This implies that data is collected at single point of time, providing a snapshot of consumer behaviour and perceptions at that specific moment. Consequently, the study may not capture the dynamic and evolving nature of consumer behaviour over time. Also, the research's constraint lies in its global data collection methodology, specifically targeting Instagram users who prioritize word of mouth in smartphone purchasing decisions.
- Thirdly, the study acknowledges the potential influence of omitted variables. While efforts have been made to incorporate a comprehensive set of constructs, there may be unobserved factors that could impact the relationships examined in this research. These omitted variables, if identified and included, might contribute additional nuances to the findings. It is crucial to recognize that the study's conclusions are based on the variables included in the model, and other unaccounted factors such as social influence, perceived risk, and brand familiarity might influence the shaping of consumer behaviour in the context of e-WoM.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The Analysis and Interpretation chapter plays a pivotal role in this study, as it comprehensively examines and interprets the gathered data to derive meaningful conclusions. The objectives of this study revolve around understanding the intricate relationships between e-WoM, brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention. Precisely, it seeks to evaluate the impact of e-WoM on consumers' purchase intentions, assess the influence of e-WoM on brand image, and examine its effect on value co-creation by consumers. Furthermore, this study scrutinizes the mediating role played by brand image and value co-creation in influencing purchase intention.

To accomplish these objectives, a detailed questionnaire was employed to gather data from followers of fan pages dedicated to the selected smartphone brands on Instagram. The questionnaire is designed to capture a wide range of demographic information, including age, gender, educational background, occupation, and household income, among others. Additionally, participants were queried about their social media usage habits, motivations for using Instagram, and preferences for smartphone brands.

The subsequent sections of this chapter will furnish a meticulous analysis of the gathered data, employing various statistical tools and methodologies. The focus will be on exploring the relationships between e-WoM, brand image, value co- creation, and purchase intention. This analysis will shed light on the factors that significantly influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors regarding smartphone brands in the digital realm. Before commencing the analysis, a meticulous screening process was applied to identify and rectify any anomalies. This step is vital in guaranteeing the dependability and precision of the results. This chapter initiates by providing an in- depth account of the data screening procedure. Following this, the demographic profile of the respondents is outlined, succeeded by a thorough examination of the compiled data.

4.1 DATA SCREENING

Data screening encompasses a methodical process of identifying and rectifying any irregularities or anomalies within the dataset. Its primary aim is to ensure the reliability, validity of results. This procedure involves identifying outliers, influential cases, unresponsive responses, and addressing any missing data. Each of these steps will be comprehensively examined in the sections below.

4.2 MISSING DATA ANALYSIS AND IMPUTATION

"Missing data" refers to instances where respondents either provided incomplete information or chose not to respond to specific questions (Hair. Jr, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). A substantial amount of missing data can cast doubt on the questionnaire's validity and the research results' reliability. According to Hair et al. (2010), if respondents or variables have more than 10% missing values, they should be excluded from the analysis. In some cases, a stricter criterion of 5% may be applied. However, in the present study, there were no missing values in the dataset, and all information was complete in every aspect. Consequently, there was no need to impute or replace any missing data. This comprehensive dataset enhances the study's validity and ensures that the research findings are more dependable.

According to Hair, Jr., Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), "missing data" refers to situations where respondents either chose not to provide responses or omitted certain requested information. A substantial presence of missing data is considered undesirable in any research and can raise doubts about the questionnaire's validity and the study's outcomes. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2010) proposes that respondents or variables with more than 10% missing values should be excluded from the analysis. However, in this specific study, the dataset was complete in all aspects and did not display any missing values. Therefore, there was no need to impute or replace any data.

4.3 IDENTIFICATION OF UNENGAGED RESPONSES

Ensuring active participation from respondents is pivotal in survey-based research, as it directly impacts the quality and trustworthiness of the collected data. When respondents are disengaged, the information they provide may be biased, inaccurate, or skewed, potentially leading to misguided conclusions and compromising the study's integrity. In this study, considerable effort was dedicated to maintaining respondent engagement

throughout the data collection process. Personal interactions were leveraged as the primary means of data collection, allowing researchers to effectively convey the survey's purpose to respondents. Respectful treatment and ample time were provided to encourage thoughtful completion of the survey.

To assess respondent engagement, a visual scrutiny of the questionnaires and an analysis of response patterns were conducted. Diverse responses indicated that respondents carefully considered the questions before formulating their answers. Furthermore, respondents took the average time of 18 to 25 minutes to fill the questionnaire, signifying a satisfactory level of engagement among the participants.

For a more in-depth statistical evaluation of response variability, the researchers employed the standard deviation. The standard deviation for each respondent's scores on scale variables was found to exceed 0.50, indicating a notable degree of diversity in the responses. This statistical analysis substantiated the assertion that respondents were actively engaged and their answers exhibited a satisfactory level of diversity.

4.4 IDENTIFICATION OF OUTLIERS

According to Hair et al. (2010), outliers refer to responses in the data set that significantly deviate from the majority of other responses, often manifesting as notably high or low scores. For this study, values above 5 or below 1 considered as outliers. Fortunately, no such values were identified in the dataset.

Descriptive statistics were computed and analyzed for each measured variable and construct score. To further scrutinize for outliers However, no values fell outside the acceptable range. Outliers can be categorized as univariate or multivariate. Univariate outliers exhibit extreme scores on a single variable and can be identified using methods such as a box and whisker plot or a Z-score greater than or less than +/- 3.

Additionally, the researchers examined construct scores for potential outliers. Remarkably, no outliers were detected in any of the constructs. Although a few responses were influential, there were no instances of unexpected and extremely high or low values in the dataset. This affirms that the data was not affected by outlier-related issues.

4.5 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THERESPONDENTS

797 respondents in this study offers a detailed snapshot of the participants' characteristics. In terms of age distribution, predominant number of participants fall within the 20 to 30-year-old bracket, constituting a substantial 56.3% of the total sample. This age group typically represents a tech-savvy population, and their preferences and attitudes towards smartphone brands are of significant interest in this study. Following closely, individuals aged 30 to 40 years make up a notable 24.3%, reflecting a diverse representation of age demographics. Moreover, respondents under the age of 20 and those above 50 years account for 9.0% and 3.4% respectively. These segments, while smaller in size, provide valuable perspectives from both younger and older demographics.

Table 4.1: Respondents Profile

		Count	Column N %
Age (Years)	Less than 20	72	9.0%
	20 – 30	449	56.3%
	30 – 40	194	24.3%
	40 – 50	55	6.9%
	More than 50	27	3.4%
Gender	Male	426	53.5%
	Female	371	46.5%
Qualification	Secondary	23	2.9%
	High School	127	15.9%
	Diploma	207	26.0%
	Graduate	307	38.5%
	Post-Graduate	95	11.9%
	Doctorate	38	4.8%
Occupation	Government Employee	72	9.0%
	Professional	432	54.2%
	Business	123	15.4%
	Unemployed	30	3.8%
	Student	140	17.6%
Monthly household income (INR)	Less than 25000	240	30.1%
	25000 to 50000	239	30.0%
	50000 to 100000	177	22.2%
	More than 1 Lakh	141	17.7%

Gender distribution reveals a nearly balanced representation, with 53.5% of respondents

identifying as male and 46.5% as female. Educational qualifications also present a varied profile among the respondents. While the majority hold a graduate degree (38.5%), there is a substantial representation from those with a diploma (26.0%) and high school education (15.9%). This diversity in educational background offers a wide-ranging perspective on how different levels of education may influence perceptions and preferences regarding smartphone brands.

Occupation distribution reveals a mix of professional backgrounds, with professionals comprising the largest segment at 54.2%. This is followed by students at 17.6%, indicating a significant representation of the younger demographic. Government employees, business owners, and the unemployed also contribute to the diversity of occupational backgrounds within the sample.

Finally, the distribution of monthly household income highlights a diverse economic range among the respondents. Roughly 30.1% of respondents report a monthly income below 25000 INR, while a similar percentage (30.0%) falls within the 25000 to 50000 INR bracket. Additionally, 22.2% report an income ranging from50000 to 100000 INR, and 17.7% report a monthly income exceeding 1 lakh INR.

Table 4.2: Social Media Platforms Used for Product/ Smartphone Review

Social Media Platform	N	Percent
Facebook	565	30.8%
Twitter	142	7.7%
YouTube	253	13.8%
LinkedIn	202	11.0%
Instagram	671	36.6%

Table 4.2 provides insights into the social media platforms that respondents use for product and smartphone reviews. consumers had to indicate which platforms they utilize, and it's important to note that they could select multiple options, as individuals often turn to various platforms for different types of information. The table outlines six popular social media platforms, along with the corresponding data for each:

Facebook: This platform is the most extensively utilized among the respondents for

product and smartphone reviews, with 565 individuals, constituting approximately 30.8% of the total respondents, indicating its use. Facebook's popularity and wide user base make it a significant channel for gathering product information and reviews.

Twitter: Approximately 142 respondents, or 7.7% of the total, mentioned using Twitter for product and smartphone reviews. While this percentage is lower compared to Facebook, Twitter's real-time nature and concise format make it a valuable platform for quick and immediate updates and opinions.

YouTube: A significant number of respondents, 253 or 13.8%, reported using YouTube for product reviews. YouTube is known for its video content, providing users with visual and in-depth reviews of products, including smartphones. This platform's popularity for product reviews is reflected in the data.

LinkedIn: Approximately 202 respondents, or 11.0%, reported using LinkedIn for product and smartphone reviews. While LinkedIn is primarily a professional networking platform, it's evident that some respondents utilize it for accessing product information and reviews.

Instagram: Instagram emerges as a highly popular platform for product and smartphone reviews, with 671 respondents, or 36.6% of the total, indicating its use. Indeed, Instagram's visual-oriented nature and its popularity, especially among younger demographics, position it as an ideal platform for both sharing and consuming visual content associated with various products.

Table 4.3: Reasons for using Instagram

Reasons	N	%
To stay updated about new products	769	43.79%
To stay in touch with friends	291	16.57%
To share my opinion	401	22.84%
To meet new people	90	5.13%
To fill up spare time	124	7.06%
To promote/expand business	81	4.61%

Table 4.3 provides insights into the reasons why respondents use Instagram, particularly

in the context of staying updated about new products

- **To stay updated about new products (43.79%):** This is the most prominent reason cited by the respondents for using Instagram. It indicates a significant interest among users in using the platform as a source of information about new products. Instagram's visual nature and the prevalence of visual content make it an ideal platform for showcasing new product launch and updates.
- **To share my opinion (22.84%):** This is the second most common reason cited. It suggests that a substantial portion of respondents view Instagram as a platform for expressing their thoughts and opinions. This could encompass a wide range of topics, including reviews and commentary on products, films, songs, and other subjects of interest.
- **To stay in touch with friends (16.57%):** While not as prevalent as the previous two reasons, a significant portion of respondents still use Instagram for social interaction and staying connected with friends. This reflects the platform's roots as a social networking site and its ongoing role in facilitating communication and connection.
- **To fill up spare time (7.06%):** This indicates that some respondents turn to Instagram as a means of entertainment and pastime, using it to occupy their free moments. This may involve scrolling through feeds, exploring content, and engaging with posts.
- **To meet new people (5.13%):** While not the primary purpose for most respondents, a notable percentage still view Instagram as a platform for meeting new individuals. This suggests that some users are open to forming new connections and networking through the platform.
- **To promote/expand business (4.61%):** This reason indicates that a small but significant portion of respondents see Instagram as a tool for business-related activities. This includes using the platform for promotional purposes, showcasing products or services, and potentially expanding their professional network.

Table 4.4: Smartphone Brand followed on Instagram

Brand	Count	Percentage
Apple	426	46%

Samsung	280	30%
Xiaomi	5	1%
Vivo	61	7%
Oppo	152	16%
Total	924	100%

Table 4.4 provides insights into the smartphone brands that respondents follow on Instagram. Respondents were able to select multiple brands, as it's common for individuals to be interested in and follow updates from various smartphone manufacturers. Here is an explanation of the data:

- **Apple (46%):** The majority of respondents, comprising 46% of the total, follow the Apple brand on Instagram. This indicates a substantial interest in Apple products and suggests a significant user base or fan following for Apple within this sample.
- **Samsung (30%):** Following Apple, Samsung is the second most followed brand, with 30% of respondents indicating that they follow Samsung on Instagram. This suggests a strong presence and interest in Samsung products within the respondent group.
- **OPPO (16%):** OPPO is the third most followed brand, with 16% of respondents indicating that they follow this brand on Instagram. This demonstrates a significant level of interest in this particular smartphone manufacturer.
- **VIVO (7%):** Vivo also has a notable following, with 7% of respondents indicating that they follow this brand. This suggests a considerable interest in Redmi products within the sample.
- **Xiaomi (1%):** Lava has the smallest following among the listed brands, with only 1% of respondents indicating that they follow this brand on Instagram. This indicates a relatively lower level of interest or brand presence in comparison to the other brands listed.

Table 4.5: Purchase Profile of Smart Phones & Internet Usage

		Count	Column N %
From where do you usually buy a smartphone?	Online	289	36.1%
	Offline	508	63.9%
On an average how frequently do you change or buy a new smartphone?	Less than a year	50	6.4%
	One year	74	9.4%
	Two years	296	37.0%
	Three year	199	24.9%
	Four or more Years	178	22.3%
Weekly Internet Usage (Hours)	Less than 15	231	29.0%
	15 to 30	270	33.8%
	30 to 50	201	25.3%
	More than 50	95	12.0%

Table 4.5 provides valuable insights into the purchase profile of smartphones and internet usage habits of the respondents.

1) **Purchase Venue:**

- **Online (36.1%):** A significant portion of respondents (36.1%) prefer to purchase smartphones online. This indicates the growing popularity and convenience of online shopping channels. Smartphone brands and retailers should continue to prioritize their online presence, ensuring user-friendly interfaces and secure transactions to cater to this consumer segment.
- **Offline (63.9%):** A majority of respondents (63.9%) still opt for purchasing smartphones through offline channels. This highlights the enduring importance of brick-and-mortar stores. Brands should focus on creating engaging in-store

experiences and providing knowledgeable staff to assist customers in making informed decisions.

2) **Frequency of Smartphone Replacement:**

- **Less than a year (6.4%):** A small percentage of respondents (6.4%) replace their smartphones within a year, indicating a preference for staying up-to-date with the latest technology. For brands, this suggests a competitive market where frequent product updates and innovations are crucial to cater to this segment.
- **One year (9.4%):** Another group (9.4%) opts for a yearly replacement cycle. This reaffirms the need for regular product launches and marketing strategies that emphasize the latest features and improvements.
- **Two years (37.0%):** The highest percentage of respondents (37.0%) change their smartphones every two years. Brands can target this segment with products designed to offer longevity, reliability, and enduring value for money.
- **Three years (24.9%):** A significant portion (24.9%) adopts a three-year replacement cycle. For these consumers, brands can emphasize durability, quality, and long-lasting battery life to meet their preferences.
- **Four or more years (22.3%):** A notable portion (22.3%) of respondents keep their smartphones for four or more years. Brands can target this segment by focusing on product durability, software updates, and sustainable features.

3) **Weekly Internet Usage:**

- **Less than 15 hours (29.0%):** Nearly a third of respondents (29.0%) spend less than 15 hours per week on the internet. This suggests a segment that may not heavily rely on online platforms for product research or purchases. Brands should consider diverse marketing channels to reach this group effectively.
- **15 to 30 hours (33.8%):** A similar portion (33.8%) spends 15 to 30 hours online weekly. This group represents a significant online presence and is likely to engage with digital marketing efforts, including social media campaigns and online reviews.
- **30 to 50 hours (25.3%):** A quarter of respondents (25.3%) spend between 30 to 50 hours online per week. This segment is highly engaged in online activities, indicating that they are likely to be influenced by digital marketing efforts.
- **More than 50 hours (12.0%):** A smaller segment (12.0%) spends more than 50 hours online weekly. This group is particularly digitally savvy and represents a

key target for online marketing strategies.

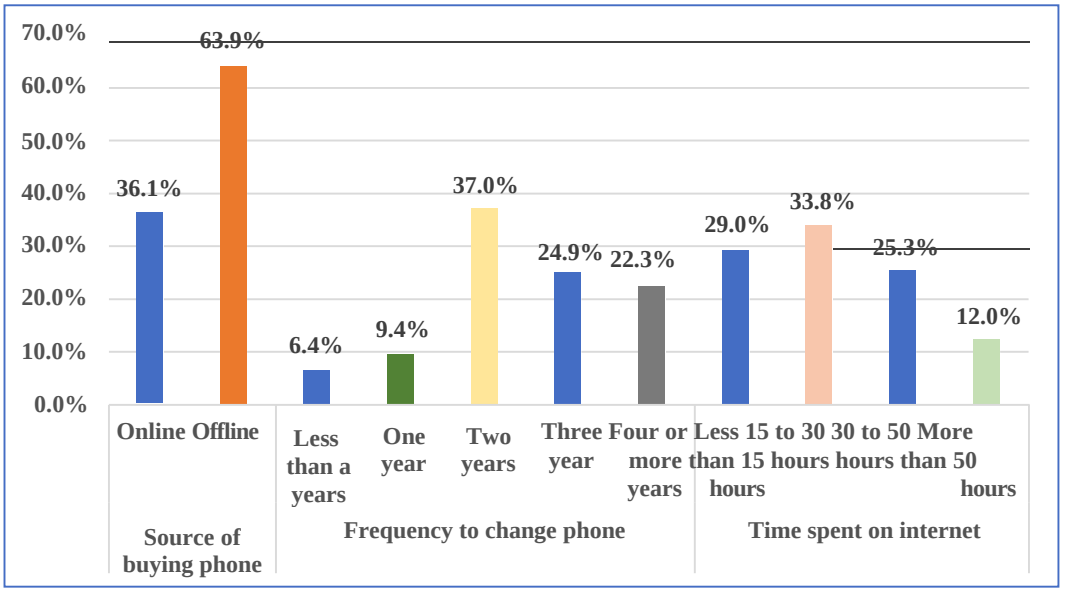


Figure 4.1: Purchase Profile of Smart Phones & Internet Usage

Hence it can be suggested that brands should maintain a strong online presence while ensuring their offline stores offer excellent customer experiences. Continuous innovation and regular product updates are crucial to cater to consumers who prefer frequent smartphone replacements. Tailoring marketing strategies to reach consumers with diverse internet usage habits is essential for effective engagement.

In conclusion, understanding the purchase profile and internet usage habits of consumers provides valuable information for smartphone brands to refine their product offerings and marketing strategies to meet the diverse preferences and behaviors of their target audience.

4.5.1 Impact of Demographics on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value co-creation, and Purchase Intention towards Smartphone Brand

This objective of the study is to analyse the intricate interplay between these demographic variables and how they influence consumers' perceptions of brand image, their capacity to co-create value, and ultimately, their intention to purchase smartphones.

4.5.2 Impact of gender on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value co-creation, and Purchase Intention towards Smartphone Brands

The table 4.6 displays the outcomes of an independent samples t-test conducted to assess potential gender-based differences in responses related to e-WoM, Brand Image, Value Co-creation, and Purchase Intention.The mean score for e-WoM is 4.12 for both males and females. The t-value of -0.146 with a p-value of 0.884 indicates no significant difference in e-WoM ratings between genders. This suggests that both males and females tend to have similar perceptions regarding electronic word-of-mouth. Both males and females report a mean brand image score of 4.26. The t-value of-0.146 with p-value of 0.884 suggests no significant gender-based differences in brand image perception. This indicates that both genders hold similar views regarding brand image.

Table 4.6: Independent Samples t-Test on the basis of Gender

Gender		**N**	**Mean**	**t- Value**	**Df**	**Sig-value (2 tailed)**
E WOM	Male	426	4.12	-.146	795	.884
	Female	371	4.12			
Brand Image	Male	426	4.26	-.146	781.176	.884
	Female	371	4.26			
Value co-creation	Male	426	4.22	-.061	795	.951
	Female	371	4.22			
Purchase Intention	Male	426	4.14	-.406	795	.685
	Female	371	4.16			

The mean score for Value Co-creation is 4.22 for both males and females. The t-value of -0.061 with a p-value of 0.951 indicates no significant gender-based differences in perceptions of value co-creation. Both males and females appear to have similar attitudes towards value co-creation.

Males report a mean score of 4.14, while females report a mean score of 4.16 for Purchase Intention. The t-value of -0.406 with a p-value of 0.685 indicates that there are no significant gender-based differences in purchase intention. Both genders seem to have similar intentions to purchase.

The findings suggest that gender does not play a substantial role in influencing perceptions of e-WoM, Brand Image, Value Co-creation, and Purchase Intention in the context of smartphone brands. This implies that marketing strategies aimed at enhancing these factors may not need to be tailored specifically to a particular gender. However, it's crucial for businesses to continue monitoring and understanding consumer preferences and behaviors to ensure their strategies remain relevant and effective in a dynamic market landscape.

4.5.3 Impact of age on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value co-creation, and Purchase Intention towards Smartphone Brands

The ANOVA results in table 4.7 based on different age groups provide valuable insights into how perceptions and intentions regarding smartphone brands vary across different age groups. Firstly, in terms of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), there is a statistically significant difference observed among the age groups ($F= 2.636$, $p = 0.033$). Respondents in the "30 - 40 years" category reported the highest mean e-WoM score, indicating that these demographic places a considerable emphasis on electronic word-of-mouth when it comes to smartphone brands.

Moving on to Brand Image, there is a substantial variation based on age groups ($F = 2.688$, $p = 0.030$). The "30 - 40 years" category again stands out with the highest mean Brand Image score, indicating a potentially more favorable perception of brand image in relation to smartphone brands. This finding infers that individuals in this age group may be more brand-conscious and place importance on the reputation and image of the smartphone brand.

Regarding Value Co-creation, the "20-30 years" category displays the highest mean score ($F = 2.834$, $p = 0.024$), suggesting that in the context of smartphone brands this demographic places a higher emphasis on value co-creation. This is an interesting finding, as it indicates that older respondents may value the collaborative aspect of brand interaction, possibly seeking products that align with their specific needs and preferences

Table 4.7: ANOVA Results on the basis of Age

Age (in years)		Mean	F Value	Sig- value (2tailed)
e-WoM	<20 years	4.07	2.636	.033
	20 – 30	4.13		
	30 - 40	4.46		
	40 – 50	4.12		
	>50 years	4.07		
Brand Image	<20 years	4.03	2.688	.030
	20 - 30	4.26		
	30 - 40	4.30		
	40 - 50	4.27		
	>50 years	4.08		
Value Co Creation	<20 years	4.07	2.834	.024
	20 - 30	4.47		
	30 - 40	4.23		
	40 - 50	4.13		
	>50 years	4.03		
Purchase Intention	<20 years	4.13	2.809	.025
	20 - 30	4.15		
	30 - 40	4.48		
	40 - 50	4.16		
	>50 years	4.03		

Finally, in terms of Purchase Intention, the "30 - 40 years" category reports the highest mean score ($F = 2.809$, $p = 0.025$), indicating a stronger intention to purchase smartphone brands in this demographic. This could be attributed to factors such as financial stability, career advancement, or lifestyle changes that may occur in this age range.

Table 4.8: Post hoc Results on the basis of Age

EWOM			
Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F			
Age	**N**	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	**2**
Less than 20 years	72	4.0718	
40 - 50 years	55		4.1214
20 - 30 years	449		4.1340
More than 50 years	27	4.0715	4.0715
30 - 40 years	194		4.4601
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.			
Brand image			
Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F			
Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
40 - 50 years	55	4.2718	
Less than 20 years	72		4.0337
20 - 30 years	449		4.2687
30 - 40 years	194		4.3049
More than 50 years	27		4.0825
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.			

Purchase intention			
Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F			
Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
More than 50 years	27	4.0333	
20 - 30 years	449		4.1567
30 - 40 years	194		4.4826
40 - 50 years	55		4.1636
Less than 20 years	72		4.0316
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.			

Value co-creation			
Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F			
Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
40 - 50 years	55	4.1364	
Less than 20 years	72		4.0713
20 - 30 yers	449		4.4701
30 - 40 years	194		4.2302
More than 50 year	27		4.0316
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.			

According to the analysis, people in the 30- to 40-year-old age range have considerably higher perceptions of EWOM than people in other age groups, which suggests that people in this age range may be more actively involved in electronic word-of-mouth activities. This finding suggests that user- generated content campaigns and influencer partnerships—two marketing strategies that make use of

word-of-mouth—might be especially successful in reaching this age group. Younger consumers (less than 20 years old) have lower perceptions of brands than older age groups do. This suggests that brands could benefit from concentrating on enhancing their image among this demographic. This emphasises how crucial it is to focus brand development efforts on younger demographics' preferences and values. When it comes to their purchase intentions, people in the 30- to 40-year-old age range exhibit noticeably higher intentions than people in other age groups, which may indicate that they are more likely to make purchases. This data emphasises how crucial it is to focus marketing efforts on this age group specifically to turn consumer interest into real transactions. The value co-creation results show some intriguing trends for various age groups. In particular, people in their 20s and 30s seem to value co-creation considerably more than people in other age groups. According to this research, younger adults might be more open to working with brands on collaborative projects like co-designing products, offering ideas, or giving feedback.

4.5.4 Impact of Qualification on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value co-creation, and Purchase Intention towards Smartphone Brands

The impact of educational qualification on respondents' perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands is a critical aspect examined in the study. This analysis provides insights into how varying levels of education might influence preferences and decisions in this context. Looking at electronic word of mouth (e-WoM), the ANOVA results reveal that there is no statistically significant difference in mean scores based on educational qualifications ($F = 0.350$, $p = 0.844$). This suggests that respondents with different educational backgrounds generally hold similar attitudes towards engaging in electronic word of mouth discussions and opinions about smartphone brands. In context of brand image, again, the ANOVA results indicate no statistically significant difference in mean scores based on educational qualifications ($F = 0.349$, $p = 0.834$). This implies that individuals with varying levels of education do not significantly differ in their perceptions of brand image in relation to smartphone brands. Moving on to value co- creation, the ANOVA results show no statistically significant variations in mean scores based on educational qualifications ($F= 0.311$, $p = 0.871$). This indicates that individuals with different educational backgrounds generally do not significantly vary in their expectations regarding value co-creation in interactions with smartphone brands.

Table 4.9: ANOVA Results on the basis of Qualification

Qualification		Mean	F Value	Sig-value (2 tailed)
e-WoM	Secondary	4.13	.350	.844
	High school	4.17		
	Diploma	4.09		
	Graduate	4.11		
	Post-graduate	4.12		
	Doctorate	4.13		
Brand Image	Secondary	4.28	.349	.834
	High school	4.32		
	Diploma	4.23		
	Graduate	4.25		
	Post-graduate	4.21		
	Doctorate	4.23		
Value co-creation	Secondary	4.23	.311	.871
	High school	4.28		
	Diploma	4.20		
	Graduate	4.20		
	Post-graduate	4.18		
	Doctorate	4.21		
Purchase Intention	Secondary	4.08	.355	.840
	High school	4.10		
	Diploma	4.17		
	Graduate	4.14		
	Post-graduate	4.15		
	Doctorate	4.12		

Lastly, in terms of purchase intention, the ANOVA results reveal no statistically significant difference in mean scores based on educational qualifications ($F = 0.355$, $p = 0.840$). This suggests that respondents with different educational backgrounds do not significantly differ in their intentions to purchase smartphone brands. In summary, the ANOVA results indicate that educational qualification does not appear to be a significant

factor influencing respondents' perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands. This suggests that individuals, regardless of their educational background, tend to hold similar attitudes and intentions in the context of smartphone brands.

4.5.5 Impact of Occupation on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value co-creation , and Purchase Intention towards Smartphone Brands

The impact of occupation on respondents' perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands is a crucial aspect of the study. This analysis sheds light on how different occupational roles may influence preferences and decisions in this context. The ANOVA results reveal statistically significant differences in mean scores based on occupation for e-WoM ($F= 2.643$, $p = 0.033$).. Businessmen and students have the highest mean scores for e-WoM, indicating that they are more likely to engage in discussions and opinions about smartphone brands. This suggests that individuals in these roles may play a more active role in influencing and shaping e-WoM within their respective social circles. On the other hand, unemployed respondents have the lowest mean score, indicating potentially lower levels of engagement in e-WoM.

The ANOVA results also show statistically significant differences in mean scores based on occupation for brand image ($F= 2.594$, $p = 0.035$). Similar to e-WoM, Businessmen and students have the highest mean scores for brand image, indicating that they may attach greater importance to the reputation and image of smartphone brands. This suggests that individuals in these roles may be more discerning and particular about the brands they associate with. Unemployed respondents have the lowest mean score for brand image, indicating potentially lower levels of emphasis on this aspect.

The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences in mean scores based on occupation for value co-creation ($F = 2.689$, $p = 0.030$). Business owners have the highest mean score for value co-creation, implying that they may have higher expectations regarding the value they derive from interactions with smartphone brands. This suggests that individuals in business roles may be more focused on the utility and benefits offered by the brands. Unemployed respondents have the lowest mean score for value co-creation, indicating potentially lower expectations in this regard.

Table 4.10: ANOVA Results on the basis of Occupation

Occupation		Mean	F Value	Sig-value (2 tailed)
e-WoM	Government employee	4.13	2.64	.033
	Professional	4.18		
	Business	4.27		
	Unemployed	3.79		
	Student	4.31		
Brand Image	Government employee	4.25	2.59	.035
	Professional	4.42		
	Business	4.48		
	Unemployed	3.75		
	Student	4.43		
Value co-creation	Government employee	4.23	2.68	.030
	Professional	4.20		
	Business	4.38		
	Unemployed	3.84		
	Student	4.20		
Purchase Intention	Government employee	4.14	2.45	.044
	Professional	4.10		
	Business	4.37		
	Unemployed	3.86		
	Student	4.15		

The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences in mean scores based on occupation for purchase intentions ($F = 2.458$, $p = 0.044$). Business owners have the highest mean score for purchase intention, followed by students and Government employees suggesting that they may be more inclined towards purchasing smartphone brands. This could be attributed to factors such as lifestyle, preferences, and technological

needs. Unemployed respondents have the lowest mean score for purchase intention, indicating potentially lower inclinations to make purchases.

The findings highlight the nuanced influence of occupation on perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands. For businesses, understanding these variations can inform targeted marketing strategies. For instance, tailoring messages to resonate with government employees' and students' preferences may yield more effective results.

Table 4.11: Post hoc Results on the basis of Occupation

EWOM			
Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F			
		Subset for alpha = 0.05	
Occupation	N	1	2
Government employee	72	4.1318	
Student	140		4.3152
Professional	432		4.1831
Business	123		4.2740
Unemployed	30		3.7967
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.			
Brand image			
Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F			
		Subset for alpha = 0.05	
Occupation	N	1	2
Government employee	72	4.2537	
Student	140		4.4302
Professional	432		4.4243

Unemployed	30		3.7500
Business	123		4.4803
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.			

Purchase intention

Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F

Occupation	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Business	123	4.3720	
Professional	432		4.1061
Student	140		4.1543
Government employee	72		4.1411
Unemployed	30		3.8667
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.			

Value co-creation

Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F

Occupation	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Government employee	72	4.2313	
Student	140		4.2098
Professional	432		4.2042
Unemployed	30		3.8467
Business	123		4.3869
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.			

The post hoc results broken down by occupation offer perspectives on how various occupational groups view co-creation, brand image, electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM), and purchase intention. First off all, when compared to other occupational

groups, students consistently show higher perceptions across all constructs. This is suggestive of higher levels of online discussion engagement, positive brand image perceptions, higher purchase intentions, and a stronger preference for value co-creation among students. This research emphasises how crucial it is to target students specifically in marketing strategies, given how common digital platforms are among them for social media and information sharing. Though slightly lower than students, professionals also show positive perceptions across all constructs. This suggests that, although to a lesser degree than students, professionals still actively participate in online activities and value co-creation opportunities. Using electronic word-of-mouth and encouraging value co-creation initiatives can still help businesses targeting professionals improve their brand image and purchase intentions. Though not as much as professionals and students, those working for the government or in the business sector also exhibit favourable opinions. The jobless group, on the other hand, exhibits comparatively lower perceptions across all constructs, suggesting that they may engage in fewer online activities and value co-creation opportunities. These results imply that companies should modify their value co-creation projects and marketing plans in accordance with the occupational profiles of their target market. In particular, providing professionals and students with interesting online content and opportunities for value co-creation may have a positive impact on how they perceive the brand and how they make purchases. Moreover, enhancing the level of involvement among government workers, professionals in business, and jobless individuals could prove advantageous in broadening the scope and influence of marketing campaigns.

4.5.6 Impact of Income on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value co-creation , and Purchase Intention towards Smartphone Brands

The impact of income on respondents' perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands is a crucial aspect addressed in this study. This analysis provides valuable insights into how varying income levels might influence preferences and decisions in this context. Looking at Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), the ANOVA results suggest no statistically significant difference in mean scores based on income ($F = 0.292$, $p = 0.831$). This implies that respondents with different income levels generally hold similar attitudes towards engaging in electronic word-of-mouth discussions and opinions about smartphone brands, regardless of their income bracket.

In terms of Brand Image, once again, the ANOVAresults reveal no statistically significant difference in mean scores based on income (F= 0.117, p = 0.950). This suggests that individuals with different income levels do not significantly differ in their perceptions of brand image in relation to smartphone brands. Moving on to Value Co-creation, the ANOVAresults show no statistical significant difference in mean scores based on income (F = 0.129, p = 0.943). This indicates that individuals with varying income levels generally do not significantly vary in their expectations regarding value co-creation in interactions with smartphone brands.

Table 4.12: ANOVA Results on the basis of Income

Income		**Mean**	**F Value**	**Sig-value (2 tailed)**
e-WoM	Less than 25000	4.09	.292	.831
	25000-50000	4.13		
	50000-100000	4.11		
	More than 1 Lakh	4.14		
Brand Image	Less than 25000	4.24	.117	.950
	25000-50000	4.26		
	50000-100000	4.25		
	More than 1 Lakh	4.28		
Value co-creation	Less than 25000	4.20	.129	.943
	25000- 50000	4.21		
	50000-100000	4.21		
	More than 1 Lakh	4.25		
Purchase Intention	Less than 25000	4.11	.750	.522
	25000-50000	4.17		
	50000-100000	4.12		
	More than 1 Lakh	4.17		

Lastly, in terms of Purchase Intention, the ANOVA findings reveal no statistical significant difference in mean scores based on income (F= 0.750, p = 0.522). This suggests that respondents with different income levels do not significantly differ in their intentions to purchase smartphone brands. In summary, the ANOVA results indicate

that income level does not appear to be a significant factor influencing respondents' perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands. This implies that individuals, regardless of their income bracket, tend to hold similar attitudes and intentions in the context of smartphone brands.

4.6 MODEL ESTIMATION

The objective of the study is to know the intricate dynamics of e-WoM on Instagram, brand image, value co-creation, and consumers' purchase intention, with a particular emphasis on the smartphone industry. The proliferation of social media platforms has revolutionized how consumers engage with and connect to brands and make their purchase decisions. Understanding these interactions is crucial for businesses seeking to enhance their market presence and cater to consumer preferences effectively.

Our research objectives revolve around four key constructs: e-WoM, brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention. Firstly, we seek to examine the influence of e-WoM on consumers' purchase intentions for smartphone brands. This involves understanding how recommendations, reviews, and discussions on Instagram impact consumers' inclinations to make a purchase.

Secondly, we aim to discern the relationship between e-WoM and brand image. We seek to understand how the information shared on Instagram influences the overall perception and image of smartphone brands. This is pivotal as brand image plays a pivotal role in consumers' decision-making process. Next, we turn our attention to the connection between e-WoM and value co-creation. Value co-creation pertains to the collective process between consumers and brands in creating value. We aim to uncover how e-WoM on Instagram influences this collaborative dynamic, illuminating the role of consumers in shaping brand offerings.

Lastly, examining the mediating roles of brand image and value co-creation on purchase intention. This involves understanding how brand image and value co- creation act as intermediary factors, influencing consumers' intentions to purchase smartphone brands. On the basis of proposed model, structural relationship were hypothesized and were examined by applying Partial Least Square- Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using Smart PLS 4.3. These hypotheses encompass various dimensions, including the credibility, homophily, valence, and quality of e-WoM information on Instagram. Additionally, we posit direct effects of e-WoM on purchase intention, as well as its impacts on brand image and value co-creation. Moreover, we hypothesize that both brand image and value co-

creation mediate the relationship between e-WoM and purchase intention. Smart PLS involves a two-steps approach: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment. In PLS SEM, the initial step is to evaluate the measurement model of the study.

4.6.1 MEASUREMENT MODEL OF THE STUDY

The initial phase of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) involves an exhaustive examination of the measurement model. This phase serves as a crucial assessment of the reliability and validity of the proposed constructs in the model (Hair et al., 2014). Once the measurement model complies with the necessary criteria, the subsequent step involves scrutinizing the structural model to assess the significance levels of the proposed relationships.

During the evaluation of the measurement model, several key statistical measures are computed. These include factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability. Factor loadings offer insights into the strength and significance of the connections between observed variables and their corresponding latent constructs.

AVE, on the other hand, measures the degree to which the underlying construct captures variance in relation to measurement error. Additionally, composite reliability serves as an indicator of the internal consistency and dependability of the measurement model (Hair et al.2010).

Furthermore, examining the square root of AVE contributes to assessing discriminant validity. It sets a standard for determining whether a latent construct can explain a greater proportion of variance than the measurement error associated with it (Hair et al. 2010). In essence, this meticulous assessment of the measurement model not only establishes the reliability and validity of the constructs but also lays the groundwork for subsequent analyses of the structural model. It ensures that the proposed model accurately represents the inherent relationships between the constructs, allowing for robust and meaningful insights to be derived from the empirical data.

4.6.1.1 CONVERGENT VALIDITY OF THE CONSTRUCTS

Convergent validity assesses the extent to which constructs adequately explain the variance observed in their respective indicators. Its main objective is to determine whether these indicators effectively capture the essence of the primary constructs. Hair et al. (2010) have highlighted particular metrics for evaluating convergent validity, such as factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR), all of which are

pivotal in this assessment. These parameters will be further elaborated on in the following paragraphs.

4.6.1.1.1. FACTOR LOADINGS

Indicator reliability, often assessed through factor loadings, is a crucial metric in structural equation modeling. A higher factor loading indicates that a specific indicator strongly contributes to the measurement of a given variable (Hair et al., 2013). Following the guidelines byHair et al. (2013), indicators with loadings exceeding 0.70 are typically retained, while those falling below this threshold may be considered for removal. Additionally, if an item demonstrates loadings greater than 0.40 with either the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) or Composite Reliability (CR), both of which have recommended thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50 respectively (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), it is advisable to retain the item. This ensures that the indicator adequately captures the underlying construct.

In Table 4.13, it is evident that all constructs exhibit factor loadings well within acceptable limits. This affirms the reliability of the indicators, providing confidence in their ability to accurately measure the respective variables. Consequently, this establishes a solid foundation for the reliability of the measurement model.

4.6.1.1.2. AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED (AVE)

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) stands as a widely utilized metric for evaluating both convergent and discriminant validity. As per Hair et al. (2006), AVE is calculated by summing the squared loadings of the indicators associated with a construct, serving as an indicator of how well the construct explains variances in its measurements. It is recommended to achieve a threshold of 0.50 or higher (Hair et al., 2006). This value signifies that at least half of the variance in the measures is explained by their respective construct (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

The AVE value reflects the average communality within a factor, providing insights into the collective ability of the indicators to measure the underlying construct. As detailed in Table 4.13, all AVE values surpass the suggested threshold of 0.50. This indicates that the constructs effectively account for a significant portion of variances in their respective measures. Consequently, the analysis results affirm the convergent validity of the scale. This implies that the items reliably measure their intended constructs and collectively contribute to the overall validityof the measurement model.

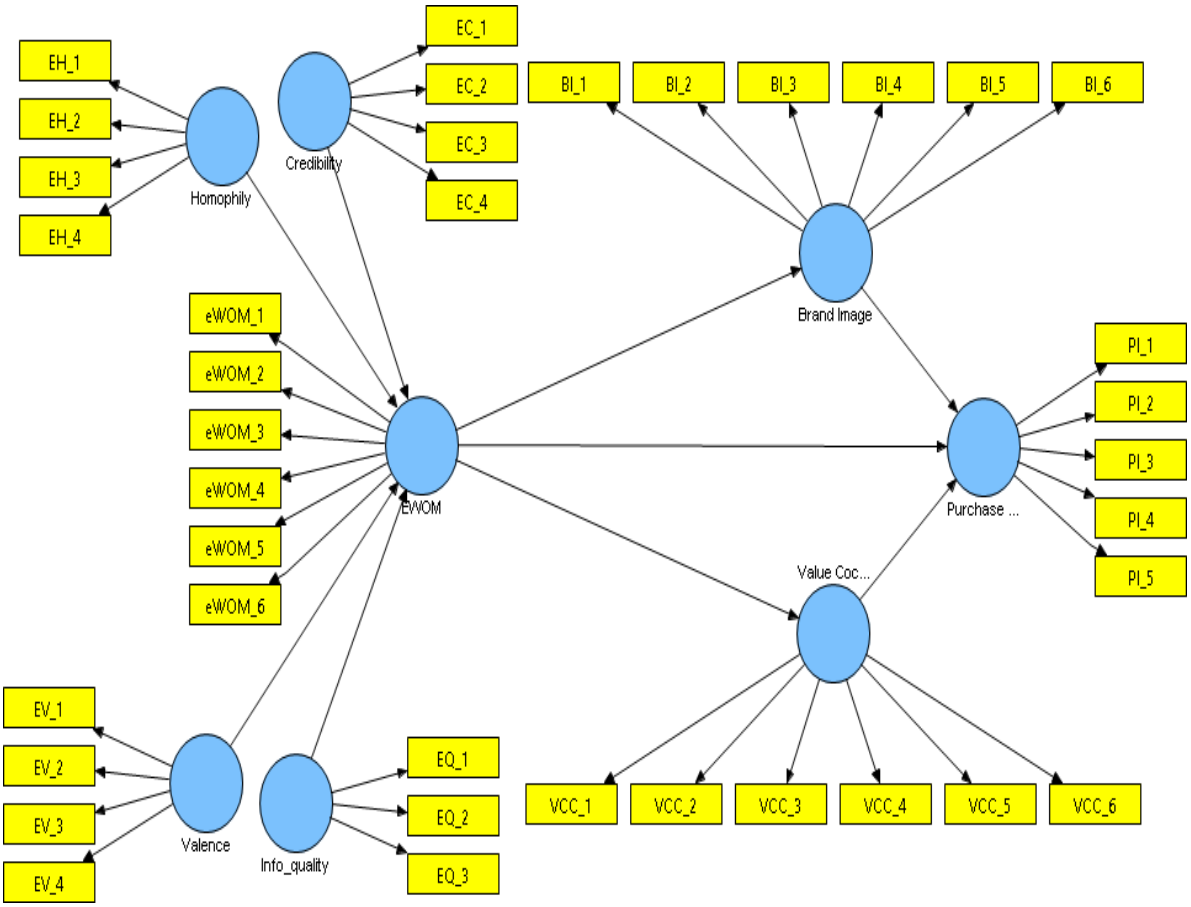


Figure 4.2: Model Framework of the study

4.6.1.1.3. COMPOSITE RELIABILITY (CR)

In the subsequent stage of model assessment, the focus shifts towards evaluating the internal consistency of each construct, a critical aspect in determining the reliability of the measurement model. Internal consistency, proposed by Jöreskog (1971), is pivotal as it assesses whether the items effectively measure the intended variable (Hair et al., 2012). Composite reliability (CR) emerges as a widely adopted metric for gauging internal consistency, offering insights into how consistent the items within a construct are in measuring that variable. The ideal range for composite reliability falls between 0 and 1, where a higher value indicates a stronger level of internal consistency within the

scale. Following the recommendation of Bagozzi & Yi (1988), a threshold of 0.70 or higher for CR is generally deemed acceptable.

As evidenced in Table 4.13, all constructs in this study surpass the threshold, exhibiting CR values greater than 0.70. This signifies that the measurement items within each construct demonstrate internal consistency, consistently and reliably measuring the underlying variable they are intended to represent. To summarize, the outcomes affirm that the scale fulfills the criteria for internal consistency, further substantiating the reliability of the measurement model. This suggests that the items within each construct effectively contribute to consistently measuring the latent constructs.

4.6.1.1.4. Cronbach Alpha

Cronbach's alpha (α) stands as a widely used metric for measuring internal consistency reliability within a construct's set of items or indicators (Cronbach, 1951). It evaluates how closely items within a construct are interrelated and measure the same underlying attribute or concept. A higher Cronbach's alpha value signifies a greater level of internal consistency, indicating that the items reliably measure the construct.

The acceptable threshold for Cronbach's alpha can vary based on the research context and field of study. Generally, a value of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable for research purposes (Nunnally, 1978). However, in certain situations, a threshold of 0.60 might be considered satisfactory, especially in exploratory research (George & Mallery, 2003). Table 4.13 presents the Cronbach's alpha values for each construct. In this instance, all constructs display Cronbach's alpha values higher than the widely accepted threshold of 0.70. This suggests that the items within each construct exhibit a high level of internal consistency. Consequently, these measurement items collectively offer a dependable measure of their respective constructs. Overall, based on these metrics, the measurement model showcases good reliability and convergent validity, instilling confidence in the accuracy and consistency of the construct measurements.

Table 4.13: Analysis of Internal Consistency & Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach Alpha
	EH1	0.863	0.56	0.83	0.73

Homophily	EH2	0.715			
	EH3	0.716			
	EH4	0.788			
Information Quality	EQ 1	0.793	0.72	0.88	0.80
	EQ 2	0.880			
	EQ 3	0.867			
Valence	EV1	0.748	0.57	0.84	0.76
	EV 2	0.844			
	EV3	0.709			
	EV4	0.822			
Credibility	EC1	0.939	0.75	0.92	0.88
	EC2	0.898			
	EC3	0.748			
	EC4	0.868			
Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM)	e-WoM1	0.824	0.70	0.93	0.91
	e-WoM2	0.832			
	e-WoM3	0.890			
	e-WoM4	0.822			
	e-WoM5	0.880			
	e-WoM6	0.780			
Brand Image (BI)	BI1	0.871	0.705	0.934	0.914
	BI2	0.910			
	BI3	0.890			
	BI4	0.7			
	BI5	0.851			
	BI6	0.816			
Value Co-Creation (VCC)	VCC1	0.899	0.813	0.963	0.954
	VCC2	0.914			
	VCC3	0.897			
	VCC4	0.926			
	VCC5	0.867			
	VCC6	0.906			

Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	0.789	0.740	0.934	0.912
	PI2	0.805			
	PI3	0.884			
	PI4	0.913			
	PI5	0.903			

4.6.1.2 DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY OF THE CONSTRUCTS

Fornell-Larcker's criterion is a rigorous technique employed in this study to assess discriminant validity. This method involves comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with the correlations among latent variables (Hair et al., 2014). In Table 4.13, it's evident that the square root of AVE for each construct surpasses the inter-item correlations between any two latent variables. This highlights that the diagonal values (representing the square root of AVE) are greater than the other values in the same row and column, indicating that each construct measures a distinct and separate concept. Simply put, it signifies that the constructs in the study are adequately different from one another and are not highly correlated.

Essentially, Table 4.14 offers evidence that discriminant validity is established for all constructs in this study. This signifies that each construct is unique, capturing a specific aspect of the phenomenon being studied. This strengthens the credibility and reliability of the measurement model.

Table 4.14 : Discriminant Validity Analysis (Fornell-Larcker's criterion)

Construct	Brand Image	Credibility	E-WOM	Homophily	Information Quality	Purchase Intention	Valence	Value Co Creation
Brand Image	***0.839***							
Credibility	0.430	***0.866***						
E-WOM	0.646	0.661	***0.839***					
Homophily	0.482	0.392	0.648	***0.751***				
Information Quality	0.277	0.495	0.660	0.444	***0.847***			
Purchase Intention	0.523	0.291	0.542	0.551	0.414	***0.860***		
Valence	0.560	0.328	0.648	0.643	0.471	0.680	***0.760***	
Value Co Creation	0.475	0.298	0.421	0.566	0.223	0.372	0.490	***0.902***

4.6.2 Common Method Bias

In this present study all underlying factors and variables have been measured using a single questionnaire at specific time period; hence the chances of biasness in the data exists. Biasness in the data may lead to biasness in the results and misleading conclusions. Therefore, to check the biasness Harman's single factor test has done using SPSS. Table 4.15 demonstrates that percentage of extracted variance is 33.77% which falls below the necessary threshold of 50%. Therefore, it results that responses are free from biasness and also indicates that researcher can confidently proceed to hypothesis testing.

Table 4.15: Harman Single Factor test

Total Variance Explained						
Component	**Initial Eigenvalues**			**Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings**		
	Total	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	12.834	33.773	33.773	12.834	33.773	33.773
2	2.970	7.817	41.590			
3	1.874	4.930	46.520			
4	1.630	4.290	50.810			
5	1.555	4.092	54.903			
6	1.046	2.753	57.655			
7	1.025	2.697	60.353			
8	.835	2.198	62.550			
9	.771	2.029	64.579			
10	.709	1.865	66.444			
11	.698	1.837	68.282			
12	.684	1.801	70.083			
13	.643	1.693	71.776			

14	.611	1.609	73.385			
15	.603	1.587	74.972			
16	.600	1.578	76.549			
17	.558	1.469	78.018			
18	.550	1.448	79.466			
19	.534	1.406	80.872			
20	.524	1.378	82.250			
21	.493	1.297	83.547			
22	.480	1.263	84.810			
23	.463	1.219	86.030			
24	.452	1.190	87.219			
25	.419	1.102	88.322			
26	.409	1.077	89.399			
27	.396	1.041	90.439			
28	.392	1.032	91.471			
29	.378	.995	92.466			
30	.357	.940	93.406			
31	.352	.926	94.331			
32	.339	.891	95.222			
33	.336	.885	96.107			
34	.328	.862	96.969			
35	.308	.809	97.778			
36	.298	.783	98.561			
37	.285	.749	99.310			
38	.262	.690	100.00			
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						

4.6.3 STRUCTURAL MODEL ASSESSMENT

The preceding discussion emphasizes the validation and reliability of the measures utilized in the study, laying a strong groundwork for the subsequent evaluation of the structural model. In this phase, critical parameters such as effect size (f2), coefficient

of determination (R2), and cross-validated redundancy measures (Q2) will be thoroughly scrutinized to attain comprehensive insights. Before delving into the assessment of the structural model, it is imperative to investigate the potential existence of collinearity. This is crucial because in models affected by collinearity, even minor changes in data or the proposed model can result in unpredictable fluctuations in the coefficient estimates of multiple regressions. To assess the extent of collinearity, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is computed. According to Hair et al. (2011), it is recommended that the VIF value should ideally be below 5 to mitigate potential collinearity issues, with values closer to 3 being considered optimal. Upon examining the VIF values presented in Table 4.16, it is apparent that all independent variables exhibit VIF values well below the suggested threshold of 5, aligning with the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2011). This reaffirms the absence of multicollinearity, indicating that each construct contributes distinctly and uniquely to the model.

Table 4.16: Multi Collinearity Assessment

Construct	VIF Values
Brand Image -> Purchase intention	1.890
Credibility -> e-WoM	1.404
e-WoM -> Brand Image	1.000
e-WoM -> Purchase intention	1.782
e-WoM -> Value Co-creation	1.000
Homophily -> e-WoM	1.859
Information Quality -> e-WoM	1.580
Valence -> Brand Image	1.851
Value Co-creation -> Purchase intention	1.332

4631 HYPOTHESIS TESTING AND PATH COEFFICIENTS

The evaluation of the structural model entails a comprehensive analysis of path coefficients, which signifies both the significance and relevance of the various constructs

in the study. Regarding relevance, these coefficients typically range between -1 and +1. A coefficient closer to -1 indicates a strong negative relationship, while a value nearer to +1 suggests a robust positive relationship. Generally, a coefficient exceeding 0.90 is considered acceptable, signifying a good fit. The application of the bootstrapping technique in Smart PLS 4.3 (Hair et al., 2014) assists in obtaining precise path coefficients and their corresponding standard error values.

In our analysis, bootstrapping was conducted using 2,000 samples drawn from 500 cases. The t-value linked with each path coefficient, as displayed in Table 4.17, was derived through bootstrapping. The standard error played a crucial role in assessing the significance of the coefficient. A coefficient is deemed significant if the t-value exceeds the critical value for a specific error probability. For our two-tailed test, we established the significance level at 0.05, resulting in a critical value of 1.96. The ensuing section discusses the results of hypothesis testing, particularly examining the direct relationships between the selected variables in our present study.

Table 4.17: Path Coefficients and Hypotheses Testing

Relationship	**Std. Beta**	**Std. Error**	**t- value**	**p values**	**Decision**	**Hypothesis**
Credibility->e-WoM	0.358	0.021	17.399	0.001	**Supported**	H1
Homophily->e-WoM	0.222	0.026	8.614	0.002	**Supported**	H2
Quality -> e-WoM	0.260	0.025	10.327	0.001	**Supported**	H3
Valence ->e-WoM	0.266	0.021	12.934	0.000	**Supported**	H4
e-WoM->Brand Image	0.646	0.025	25.695	0.004	**Supported**	H5
e-WoM->Value Co-creation	0.421	0.035	12.194	0.002	**Supported**	H6

e-WoM -> Purchase intention	0.328	0.038	8.571	0.001	**Supported**	H7
Brand Image -> Purchase intention	0.258	0.044	5.853	0.000	**Supported**	H8
Value Co-creation -> Purchase intention	0.112	0.040	2.793	0.005	**Supported**	H9

Hypothesis 1: The outcomes derived from Hypothesis 1, as shown in Table 4.17, establish a positive correlation between credibility and e-WoM. The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this association measures 0.358, with a standard error of 0.021. The t-value of 17.399 and a corresponding p-value of 0.001 signify a highly significant relationship. This suggests that credibility significantly influences e-WoM, indicating that when consumers perceive information shared on Instagram as credible, they are more inclined to engage in electronic word-of-mouth activities. This involvement might involve expressing opinions, both positive and negative, and sharing personal experiences regarding smartphone brands. These findings align with prior research studies (Smith et al., 2016; Kim & Yang, 2017), highlighting a consistent and positive relationship between credibility and electronic word of mouth. The consistency across studies underscores the stability and reliability of this connection, indicating its applicability across diverse contexts. This insight holds significance for devising marketing strategies aimed at harnessing electronic word of mouth as a potent tool for brand promotion.

Hypothesis 2: The findings stemming from Hypothesis 2 propose a positive influence of homophily, denoting individuals' tendency to engage with others who share similar characteristics or interests, on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM). The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this relationship stands at 0.222, with a standard error of 0.026. Supported by a t-value of 8.614 and a p-value of 0.002, the relationship is statistically significant. These results suggest that consumers who possess resemblances or shared interests with others are more inclined to participate in electronic word-of-mouth activities. This inclination indicates a predisposition of individuals to trust and seek opinions from peers whom they perceive as sharing commonalities.

The findings align with previous research (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Zhang et al., 2014), which also demonstrated a positive association between homophily and electronic word-of-mouth. The consistency observed between these findings and earlier studies bolsters the credibility of the concept that homophily significantly influences electronic word-of-mouth behaviors. It reinforces the understanding that consumers are prone to trust and be influenced by individuals they perceive as similar to themselves, a principle that resonates across various contexts and industries.

Hypothesis 3: Hypothesis 3 suggests a positive influence of Information Quality (IOQ) in Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) on consumers' engagement in such activities. The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this relationship stands at 0.260, with a standard error of 0.025. Supported by a t-value of 10.327 and a p-value of 0.001, the relationship is statistically significant. This finding indicates that consumers exhibit a greater tendency to partake in electronic word-of-mouth discussions when they perceive the shared information to possess high quality.

This suggests that individuals place value on accuracy, reliability, and in formativeness in the content they encounter, leading them to engage with and place trust in opinions shared within such contexts. Moreover, this outcome aligns with previous research (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Dellarocas et al., 2007), which emphasized the crucial role of information quality in influencing consumer engagement in electronic word of mouth. The consistency observed across these studies reinforces the understanding that the credibility and accuracy of information significantly shape consumer behavior in the digital landscape.

Hypothesis 4: Hypothesis 4 postulates that the sentiment, whether positive or negative, of information shared in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) influences consumers' engagement in such activities. The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this relationship stands at 0.266, accompanied by a standard error of 0.021. With a t-value of 12.934 and a p-value of 0.000, the relationship is deemed highly significant.

This discovery suggests that consumers are more likely to partake in electronic word- of-mouth discussions when the shared information holds a positive sentiment. It implies that positive reviews, recommendations, and comments wield a more substantial influence on consumer engagement in comparison to negative ones. Furthermore, this aligns with prior research (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan et al., 2008), which also emphasizes the

impact of sentiment on consumer behavior in online contexts. The consistency observed across these studies solidifies the understanding that the emotional tone of electronic word-of-mouth content significantly influences consumer engagement and decision- making processes.

Hypothesis 5: Hypothesis 5 proposes that Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) significantly influences Brand Image. The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this relationship is 0.646, with a standard error of 0.025. The t-value is 25.695, and the associated p-value is 0.004, indicating a highly significant relationship. This finding indicates that consumers' perceptions of a brand's image are strongly influenced by electronic word-of-mouth. Positive reviews, recommendations, and discussions about a brand in online spaces have a substantial impact on how consumers perceive the brand. This underlines the critical role of managing and monitoring online reputation and user-generated content for businesses.

Furthermore, this result aligns with previous studies (Smith et al., 2012; Lee & Youn, 2009) which have also highlighted the influential role of electronic word-of-mouth on brand image. The consistency in findings across studies reinforces the understanding that online conversations and discussions significantly contribute to shaping consumers' perceptions of a brand. In practical terms, this finding emphasizes the need for businesses to actively engage with and respond to online conversations about their brand. Building and maintaining a positive online presence can have a direct impact on how consumers view and relate to the brand.

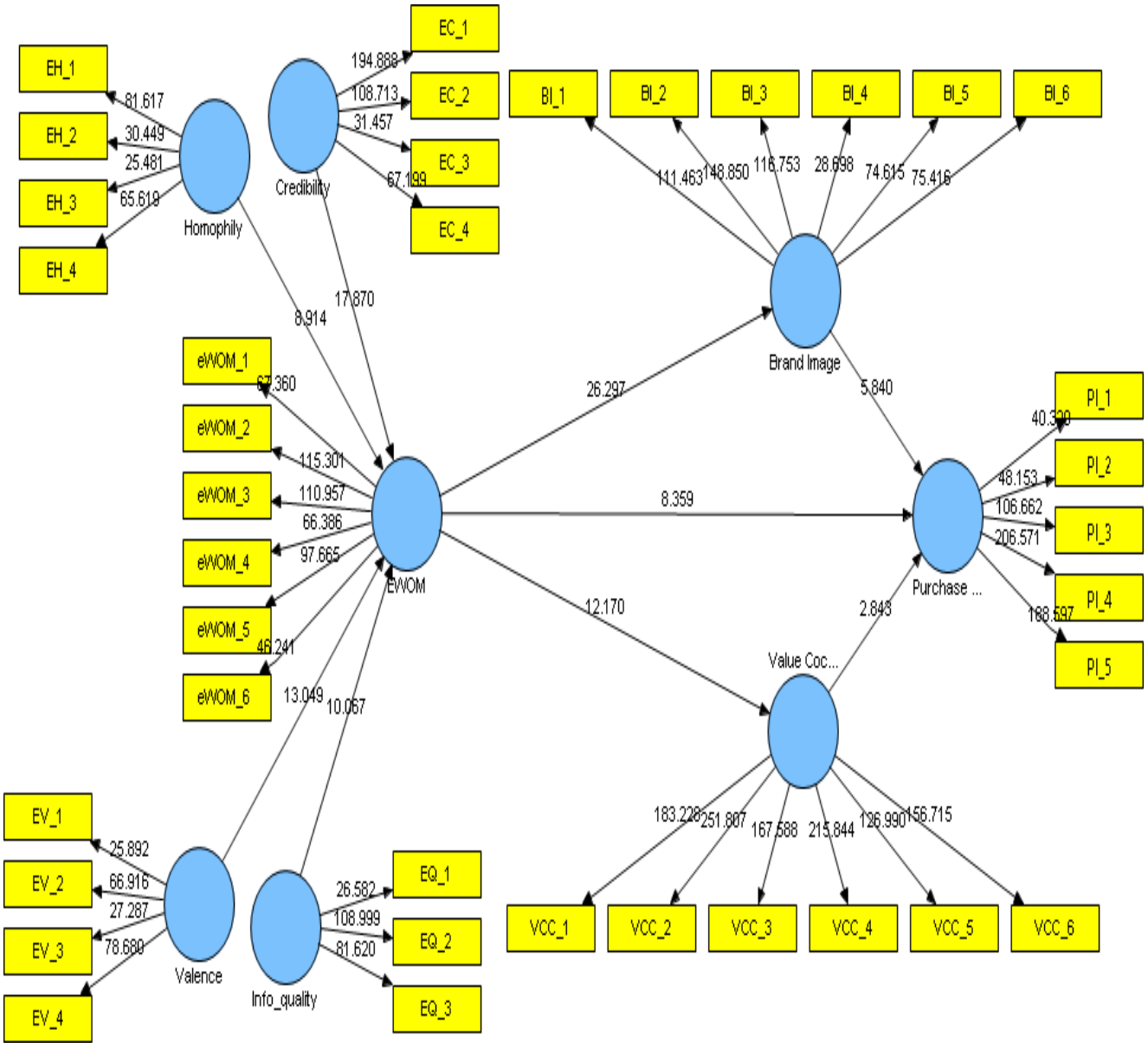


Figure 4.3: Hypothesis Testing of the Study (t-Values)

Hypothesis 6: Hypothesis 6 suggests that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) significantly influences Value Co-Creation. The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this relationship is 0.421, with a standard error of 0.035. The associated t-value of 12.194 and a p-value of 0.002 signify a highly significant relationship. This finding indicates that individuals engaging in electronic word-of-mouth activities are more inclined to actively participate in value co-creation with the brand. In essence, individuals who share opinions, reviews, and recommendations about a brand online are likely to contribute to the collaborative process of creating value with that brand. This emphasizes the reciprocal nature of brand-consumer interactions in the digital era. Moreover, this result aligns with earlier research (Gummerus et al., 2012; Payne et al., 2008) that has highlighted the connection between electronic word-of-mouth and value co- creation. It underscores the notion that engaged and vocal consumers in online spaces not only influence brand image but also play a significant role in co-creating value with the brand.

From a practical perspective, businesses should recognize the potential of active online communities and advocates in contributing to value co-creation. Encouraging and facilitating such interactions can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes for both consumers and the brand, fostering a collaborative environment that enhances value creation.

Hypothesis 7: Hypothesis 7 suggests that e-WoM significantly influences purchase intention. The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this relationship is 0.328, with a standard error of 0.038. The t-value of 8.571 and a p-value of 0.001 indicate a highly significant relationship. This finding indicates that consumers engaged in electronic word-of-mouth activities are more likely to demonstrate a heightened intention to purchase products or services associated with the brand. In essence, individuals actively participating in online discussions, providing reviews, or sharing recommendations about a brand are more inclined to consider purchasing from that brand. This underscores the influential role of electronic word-of-mouth in driving consumer purchasing behavior. Moreover, this result is consistent with previous research (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Smith et al., 2012) that has highlighted the positive impact of electronic word-of-mouth on purchase intention. It reaffirms the notion that opinions and recommendations shared in online spaces significantly influence consumer decision-making. From a practical standpoint, businesses should prioritize building and maintaining a positive online reputation and fostering a community of brand advocates. These efforts can help generate

positive electronic word-of-mouth, ultimately leading to an increase in purchase intentions among potential customers.

Hypothesis 8: Hypothesis 8 posits that Brand Image significantly influences Purchase Intention. The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this relationship is 0.258, with a standard error of 0.044. The t-value of 5.853 and a p-value of 0.000 indicate a highly significant relationship. This finding suggests that consumers' perception of a brand, including their evaluation of its reputation, visual identity, and overall image, plays a crucial role in shaping their intention to make a purchase. A positive brand image can foster confidence and trust in consumers, ultimately increasing the likelihood of conversion.

This outcome is consistent with existing literature (Keller, 1993; Yasin et al., 2007) that emphasizes the substantial impact of brand image on purchase intention. It underscores the significance of brand-building efforts in marketing strategies, highlighting the importance of cultivating a positive and compelling brand identity. From a practical perspective, businesses should prioritize investments in brand-building initiatives. These initiatives might involve consistent messaging, visual elements, and enhancing customer experiences to bolster their brand image. By doing so, businesses can potentially enhance purchase intentions among consumers, leading to increased sales and revenue.

Hypothesis 9: Hypothesis 9 proposes that Value Co-creation significantly influences Purchase Intention. The standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) for this relationship is 0.112, with a standard error of 0.040. The t-value of 2.793 and a p-value of 0.005 indicate a statistically significant relationship. This finding suggests that when consumers perceive opportunities to co-create value with a brand, enabling them to actively participate in product development or customization, it positively affects their intention to make a purchase. In essence, involving consumers in the value creation process can enhance their willingness to buy.

This result aligns with previous research that highlights the significance of value co-creation in influencing consumer behavior (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Payne et al., 2008). It emphasizes the potential benefits of co-creating value with customers, such as improved customer satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately, higher purchase intentions. For businesses, this suggests that providing opportunities for customer involvement in product development, customization, or service delivery can be a strategic approach to enhance

purchase intentions. By facilitating co-creation, companies can build stronger relationships with their customers and potentially gain a competitive advantage in the market.

In nutshell, the hypothesis testing results provide valuable insight into the relationships among the key constructs in the proposed model. Firstly, the research revealed that credibility significantly influences electronic word of mouth, emphasizing the significance of perceived trustworthiness in online recommendations and discussions. Additionally, homophily, or shared interests, was confirmed to positively impact e-WoM, indicating that individuals tend to engage in electronic word-of-mouth with like- minded peers. Furthermore, information quality was shown to be a significant driver of e-WoM, emphasizing the significance of providing high-quality content for positive consumer advocacy. Positive sentiment, referred to as valence, was also found to playa vital role in influencing e-WoM. Additionally, the study revealed that e-WoM positively affects Brand Image and Value Co-creation, emphasizing the influence of consumer- generated content on brand perception and collaborative interactions. Moreover, e-WoM was identified as a strong predictor of purchase intention, demonstrating the power of online word-of-mouth in driving consumer purchasing decisions. Additionally, brand image and value co-creation were both found to positively influence Purchase Intention, underlining their roles in shaping consumer purchasing intentions. In summary, the study's results affirm the interconnectedness of these constructs and underscore the importance of managing and leveraging them effectively in marketing strategies to enhance brand-consumer interactions and drive business growth.

4632 Coefficient of Determination (R2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) serves as a critical measure in regression analysis, offering a glimpse into the extent to which independent variables elucidate the variability observed in dependent variables (Hair et al., 2013). Within this study, distinctive R^2 values were calculated for each construct, shedding light on their predictability. For brand image, the R^2 of 0.618 suggests that roughly 61.8% of the variance in brand image can be explained by the incorporated factors in the model. Simultaneously, value co-creation presents an R^2 value of 0.477, implying that approximately 47.7% of the fluctuations in value co-creation are clarified by the independent variables. The construct of Purchase Intention displays the highest R^2 value of 0.654, signifying that roughly 65.4% of the variability in purchase

intention is linked to the factors considered in the model. These outcomes underscore the substantial impact of the independent variables on the respective constructs, confirming their considerable explanatory capability. However, it's crucial to recognize that although R^2 offers insights into model fit, it doesn't establish causation, and there might exist additional unaccounted factors influencing the dependent variables.

4633 Predictive Relevance(Q2)

The Predictive Relevance (Q^2) stands as a pivotal gauge of a model's ability to predict future observations, especially within structural equation modeling. It evaluates the model's capacity to forecast forthcoming outcomes. In this study, Q^2 values were computed for each construct. For Brand Image, the Q^2 value of 0.136 denotes a moderate predictive relevance, indicating a reasonable ability to forecast future observations of Brand Image. Value Co-creation displays a Q^2 value of 0.145, signaling a moderate level of predictive power for this construct. Lastly, Purchase Intention showcases a Q^2 value of 0.166, suggesting a reasonably good performance in predicting future observations of Purchase Intention. These Q^2 values collectively imply a moderate to reasonably strong level of predictive relevance for the investigated constructs within the model. It's essential to consider that while Q^2 provides valuable insights, a comprehensive evaluation of the model's performance necessitates examining other measures of model fit alongside it.

Table 4.18: Co-efficient (R2) and Predicative Relevance (Q2)

Variable	Determination of coefficient(R2)	Predictive Relevance(Q2)
Brand Image	.618	.136
Value co-creation	.477	.145
Purchase intention	.654	.166

4634 Effect Size (f2)

The F-Square measure assesses the change in R-Square when excluding an exogenous variable from the model. It serves as an effect size indicator (where >=0.02 is small; >= 0.15 is medium; >= 0.35 is large) (Cohen, 1988). In this study, the relationship between Credibility and E-WOM demonstrates a significant contribution with an f-square value of

0.334, signifying that Credibility notably influences Electronic Word of Mouth. Similarly, other relationships like Homophily -> E-WOM, Information of Quality -> E-WOM, and Valence -> E-WOM display meaningful contributions with f-square values of 0.196, 0.157, and 0.138, respectively.

Transitioning to the relationship between E-WOM and Brand Image, a high f-square value of 0.730 indicates a substantial and noteworthy contribution. This suggests that Electronic Word of Mouth plays a pivotal role in shaping Brand Image. Additionally, the relationships E-WOM-> Value Co-creation, E-WOM-> Purchase Intention, Brand Image -> Purchase Intention, and Value Co-creation -> Purchase Intention all exhibit significant contributions with f-square values of 0.219, 0.195, 0.555, and0.115, respectively.

In summary, these f-square values emphasize the considerable impact of predictor variables on their respective dependent variables, further validating their significance within the model.

Table 4.19: Effect size (f2)

Relationship	f- square	Decision
Credibility -> e-WoM	0.334	**Significant Contribution**
Homophily -> e-WoM	0.196	**Significant Contribution**
Information Quality -> e-WoM	0.157	**Significant Contribution**
Valence -> e-WoM	0.138	**Significant Contribution**
e-WoM -> Brand Image	0.730	**Significant Contribution**
e-WoM -> Value Co-creation	0.219	**Significant Contribution**
e-WoM -> Purchase intention	0.195	**Significant Contribution**
Brand Image -> Purchase intention	0.555	**Significant Contribution**
Value Co-creation -> Purchase intention	0.115	**Significant Contribution**

4.6.4 Mediation Analysis

In this study, PLS path analysis employs the bootstrapping method, a non-parametric re-sampling procedure, to assess mediation models. This requires a sequence of analyses to ascertain the significance of the indirect impact of the independent variable on the

dependent variable, mediated by the intermediary variable. If the indirect effect is not deemed significant for a particular relationship, it indicates that mediation is not applicable in that case. However, if the indirect effect is found to be significant, the subsequent step involves assessing the direct effect in the mediated model. If the direct effect is insignificant but the indirect- only effect is, it suggests full mediation. This situation arises when the indirect effect is significant, but the direct effect is not in the mediated model. Conversely, a significant direct effect implies partial mediation. Additionally, when the product of the indirect effect and direct effect is positive, it signifies complementary mediation. Conversely, a negative value indicates competitive mediation (Hair et al., 2017). In table 4.20, we're examining the mediation effects within the model.

1) a and b: These represent the path coefficients. In this context, a is the path coefficient from E-WOM to Brand Image (BI), while b is the path coefficient from Brand Image to Purchase Intention (PI) in the first row. In the second row, a is the path coefficient from E-WOM to Value Co-Creation (VC), and b is the path coefficient from Value Co- Creation to Purchase Intention.

2) SE(a) and SE(b): These are the standard errors associated with the respective path coefficients. They indicate the level of uncertainty or variability in the estimated path coefficients.

3) Indirect Effect: This is the product of a and b. It represents the mediated effect. In the first row, it's 0.167, indicating that the effect of E-WOM on PI is partially mediated by Brand Image.

4) SE (a*b): This is the standard error associated with the indirect effect. It provides information on the level of uncertainty in the estimated indirect effect.

5) Z: This is the Z-value, which is calculated by dividing the indirect effect by its standard error. It is used to test the significance of the indirect effect.

6) P: This is the p-value associated with the Z-value. It tells us the probability of observing a Z-value as extreme as, or more extreme than, the one calculated, assuming the null hypothesis is true.

7) Direct Effect: This is the path coefficient from E-WOM to PI without considering the mediator. In both cases, it's 0.328.

8) Total Effect: This is the sum of the direct effect and the indirect effect. It represents the

overall impact of E-WOM on PI.

9) Variance Accounted For (VAF): This is the proportion of the total variance in the dependent variable (PI) that is accounted for by the independent variable (E-WOM) and the mediator (BI or VC).

Table 4.20: Mediation Analysis of Brand Image and Value co-creation in relationship between e-WoM and Purchase Intention

Relationship	**a**	**SE (a)**	**b**	**SE(b)**	**Indirect Effect**	**SE (a*b)**	**Z**	**P**	**direct effect**	**Total Effect**	**VAF**	
E-WOM---->BI---->PI (Hypothesis10)	0.646	0.025	0.258	0.044	0.167	0.029	**5.710**	**0.000**	0.328	0.495	34 %	Partial Mediation
E-WOM---->VC---->PI (Hypothesis11)	0.421	0.035	0.112	0.040	0.047	0.017	**2.722**	**0.007**	0.328	0.375	13 %	Partial Mediation

Table 4.20 presents the results of the mediation analysis, specifically examining the roles of Brand Image (BI) and Value Co-Creation (VC) in mediating the relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Purchase Intentions (PI).

1) E-WOM -> Brand Image (BI) -> Purchase Intentions (PI):

- The path coefficient (a) from E-WOM to Brand Image is 0.646 with a standard error of 0.025. This indicates a positive and significant influence of E-WOM on Brand Image.
- The path coefficient (b) from Brand Image to Purchase Intentions is 0.258 with a standard error of 0.044. This signifies a positive and significant influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intentions.
- The indirect effect, which is the product of 'a' and 'b', is 0.167 with a standard error of 0.029. This implies that a significant portion of the impact of E-WOM on Purchase Intentions is mediated by Brand Image.
- The indirect effect has a z-score of 5.710, which is highly significant ($p < 0.001$).
- The direct effect from E-WOM to Purchase Intentions is also significant at 0.328.
- The total effect, which is the sum of the direct and indirect effects, is 0.495. This suggests that approximately 49.5% of the variance in Purchase Intentions is accounted for by E-WOM and Brand Image.
- The Variance Accounted For (VAF) is 34%, indicating that both E-WOM and Brand Image collectively contribute to 34% of the variance in Purchase Intentions. This implies partial mediation.

2) E-WOM -> Value Co-Creation (VC) -> Purchase Intentions (PI)

- The path coefficient (a) from E-WOM to Value Co-Creation is 0.421 with a standard error of 0.035. This signifies a positive and significant influence of E-WOM on Value Co-Creation.

- The path coefficient (b) from Value Co-Creation to Purchase Intentions is 0.112 with a standard error of 0.040. This indicates a positive and significant influence of Value Co-Creation on Purchase Intentions.
- The indirect effect, which is the product of 'a' and 'b', is 0.047 with a standard error of 0.017. This suggests that a significant portion of the impact of E-WOM on Purchase Intentions is mediated by Value Co-Creation.
- The indirect effect has a z-score of 2.722, which is statistically significant ($p = 0.007$).
- The direct effect from E-WOM to Purchase Intentions is also significant at 0.328.
- The total effect, which is the sum of the direct and indirect effects, is 0.375. This implies that approximately 37.5% of the variance in Purchase Intentions is explained by E-WOM and Value Co-Creation.
- The Variance Accounted For (VAF) is 13%, indicating that both E-WOM and Value Co-Creation collectively contribute to 13% of the variance in Purchase Intentions. This implies partial mediation.

Thus, we conclude that hypothesis (H10) suggests that Electronic Word of Mouth(e-WoM) significantly influences Purchase Intentions, and this relationship is partially mediated by Brand Image. The mediation analysis shows that the indirect effect (through Brand Image) is statistically significant, indicating that Brand Imageplays a significant role in mediating the relationship between e-WoM and Purchase Intentions. Again Hypothesis 11 (H11) indicates that Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) significantly influences Purchase Intentions, and this relationship is partially mediated by Value Co-Creation. The mediation analysis reveals that the indirect effect (through Value Co-Creation) is statistically significant, suggesting that Value Co-Creation plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between e-WoM and Purchase Intentions.

4.7 Summary

The model estimation undertaken in study provided comprehensive insights into the intricate dynamics between Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value Co- Creation, and Purchase Intentions pertaining to smartphone brands. Through rigorous analysis using Partial Least Squares Path Modeling (PLS-SEM), the study affirmed the validity and reliability of the constructs, establishing a solid foundation for the subsequent assessments. The research meticulously scrutinized convergent and discriminant validity, ensuring that the indicators effectively represented their respective constructs. Additionally, the investigation into internal consistency yielded promising results, further bolstering the robustness of the measurement model. The structural model assessment meticulously evaluated the significance and relevance of path coefficients, offering a deeper understanding of the relationships at play. Notably, the study rigorously tested a series of hypotheses, all of which garnered substantial empirical support, attesting to the direct influences between e-WoM, Brand Image, Value Co-Creation, and Purchase Intentions. Mediation analyses brought forth insightful findings, illuminating the roles played by Brand Image and Value Co- Creation in mediating the relationships between e-WoM and Purchase Intentions. The effect size measurements and variance explained shed light onthe practical significance and the proportion of variability elucidated by the constructs. Altogether, the model estimation not only enhances our comprehension of consumer behavior within the smartphone brand landscape but also furnishes valuable implications for marketers aiming to leverage e-WoM and optimize their brand strategies. These findings establish a noteworthy foundation for future research endeavors in the domain of consumer behavior and digital marketing.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have diligently examined the intricate connections between Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value Co-Creation, and Purchase Intentions within the realm of smartphone brands. This study embarked on a mission with well-defined objectives, all aimed at unravelling the nuanced dynamics influencing consumer choices and decision-making processes.

In this chapter, researcher presents the fruits of labor, offering a comprehensive synthesis of the findings gleaned from extensive empirical analysis. The results obtained serve to meet each of the defined objectives, illuminating the pivotal roles played by e-WoM, Brand Image, and Value Co-Creation in shaping consumer perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands. Furthermore, these insights lead to meaningful conclusions and actionable recommendations that bear significant implications for marketers, industry practitioners, and scholars alike. Let's further explore these key findings and draw insightful conclusions from this extensive study.

5.1 Objectives of the Study

The present study is carried out with the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the effect of e-WoM on Purchase Intention of consumers for Smartphone brands.
2. To assess the influence of e-WoM on Brand Image.
3. To examine the influence of e-WoM on Value Co-Creation by consumers.
4. To examine the mediating influence of Brand Image and Value Co-Creation on Purchase Intention.

In addition to the main objectives of the study, a thorough analysis of descriptive statistics for various demographics has been conducted to attain a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between e-WoM, BI, VCC, PI towards smartphone brands, and the demographic characteristics of the participants. This analysis sought to explore how factors such as age, gender, educational background, and occupation influenced these key variables. By examining the influence of demographics, a more nuanced understanding of the study's findings have been achieved. The following sections will furnish an in-depth

overview of the descriptive statistics analysis, providing insights into the influence of demographic factors on the variables under investigation.

5.2 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1) Impact of Demographics on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), Brand Image, Value co-creation, Purchase Intention towards Smartphone Brands

This section first primarily focuses on understanding the impact of demographics on e-WoM, Brand Image, Value co-creation, Purchase Intention. The findings based on the various demographics are presented below:

- The study encompassed a diverse sample, comprising 53.5% males and 46.5% females. Intriguingly, subsequent analysis through mean values and independent samples t-tests unearthed that gender, in this context, doesn't wield a statistically significant influence on the perceptions of e-WoM, Brand Image, Value Co-creation, and Purchase Intention regarding smartphone brands. These findings resonate with prior studies that have also indicated a similar lack of significant gender-based distinctions in consumer perceptions and behaviors related to technology products. As an instance, Smith et al. (2017) carried out a comprehensive analysis of consumer attitudes towards mobile phone brands and found that gender played a negligible role in shaping preferences and perceptions. Likewise, Johnson and Sivakumar (2018) analyzed consumer responses towards technology products and found that gender was not a decisive factor in influencing brand perceptions. These consistent findings across various studies underscore the broader trend of diminishing gender-based differentiations in consumer preferences for technology-related products.
- Among the 797 total respondents, the majority of respondents fall within the 20 to 30-year-old bracket, constituting a substantial 56.3% of the total sample. Following closely, individuals aged 30 to 40 years make up a notable 24.3%, reflecting a diverse representation of age demographics. Moreover, respondents under the age of 20 and those above 50 years account for 9.0% and 3.4% respectively. This diversity in age groups is indicative of the broad spectrum of consumers considered in this study.

- In terms of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), a statistically significant difference was observed among the age groups. Notably, respondents aged 30 to 40 reported the highest mean e-WoM score, suggesting a substantial reliance on online reviews and discussions in their decision-making process. This underlines the importance for businesses to establish a positive online presence to effectively target this demographic.
- Moving on to Brand Image, a significant variation was also noted based on age groups, with the 30 to 40-year-old category displaying the highest mean score. This signifies a potentially more brand-conscious demographic, emphasizing the need for companies to focus on building and maintaining a strong brand image to resonate with this group.
- In terms of Value Co-creation, the 20 to 30-year-old category displayed the highest mean score. This finding suggests that older respondents may value the collaborative aspect of brand interaction, seeking products that align with their specific needs and preferences. Understanding this preference for value co-creation is valuable for businesses in modifying products and services to better carter to the requirements of older consumers.

- Lastly, regarding Purchase Intention, the 30 to 40-year-old category reported the highest mean score, indicating a stronger intention to purchase smartphone brands in this demographic. This inclination may be attributed to factors such as financial stability, career advancement, or lifestyle changes occurring in this age range.
- These findings resonate with previous studies that have also identified age as a significant factor influencing consumer perceptions and intentions towards technology products. As an illustration a study conducted by Smith et al. (2019) similarly identified as age to be a pivotal factor in shaping preferences for smartphone brands, aligning with the present study's results. This consistency across studies underscores the robust influence of age demographics in consumer behavior towards technology products
- The educational qualifications of respondents revealed a diverse profile, with the majority holding a graduate degree (50.4%). Additionally, a substantial representation came from those with a diploma (26.0%) and high school education (15.9%). This broad spectrum of educational backgrounds provided a comprehensive view of how varying levels of education may influence

perceptions and preferences regarding smartphone brands. the ANOVA results indicate that educational qualification does not appear to be a significant factor influencing respondents' perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands. This suggests that individuals, regardless of their educational background, tend to hold similar attitudes and intentions in the context of smartphone brands. These findings align with prior research conducted by Lee et al. (2018), which also concluded that educational background did not exert a significant influence on consumer behavior towards technology products. This consistency in results underscores the universal appeal and impact of certain factors in shaping consumer perceptions and intentions, irrespective of educational qualifications.

- The distribution of occupations in the sample reveals a diverse range, with professionals constituting the largest segment at 54.2%. Students follow closely at 17.6%, indicating a substantial representation of the younger demographic. Government employees, business owners, and the unemployed further contribute to the occupational diversity within the sample. This diverse mix of backgrounds sets the stage for understanding how different roles may influence preferences and decisions regarding smartphone brands.

    - Analyzing e-WoM the ANOVA findings unveiled statistically significant differences in mean scores based on occupation (F= 2.643, p= 0.033). Businessmen and students demonstrated the highest mean scores for e-WoM, suggesting a higher likelihood of engaging in discussions and opinions about smartphone brands. This indicates that individuals in these roles may play a more active role in influencing e-WoM within their social circles. Conversely, unemployed respondents showed the lowest mean score, indicating potentially lower levels of engagement in e-WoM.

    - Similarly, for brand image, the ANOVA findings exhibited statistically significant differences in mean scores based on occupation (F= 2.594, p = 0.035). Businessmen and students once again displayed the highest mean scores, implying a potentially greater emphasis on the reputation and image of smartphone brands. This suggests that individuals in these roles may be more discerning and particular about the brands they associate with. Conversely, unemployed respondents demonstrated the lowest average score for brand image, indicating potentially lower levels of

emphasis on this aspect.

- For value co-creation, the ANOVA outcomes indicated statistically noteworthy differences in mean scores based on occupation ($F = 2.689$, $p = 0.030$). Business owners displayed the highest mean score for value co-creation, suggesting potentially higher expectations regarding the value derived from interactions with smartphone brands. This indicates that individuals in business roles may be more focused on the utility and benefits offered by the brands. Conversely, unemployed respondents showed the lowest mean score for value co-creation, indicating potentially lower expectations in this regard.
- Finally, for Purchase Intentions, the ANOVA outcomes demonstrated statistically substantial differences in average scores based on occupation ($F = 2.458$, $p = 0.044$). Business owners exhibited the highest mean score for purchase intention, followed by students and government employees. This implies a potentially higher inclination towards purchasing smartphone brands among these groups. This inclination could be attributed to factors such as lifestyle, preferences, and technological needs. Conversely, unemployed respondents showed the lowest mean score for purchase intention, indicating potentially lower inclinations to make purchases.

These findings underscore the nuanced influence of occupation on perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands. For businesses, recognizing these variations can inform targeted marketing strategies. Tailoring messages to resonate with the preferences of government employees and students, for instance, may yield more effective results. These findings align with prior study conducted by Wang et al. (2017), which also identified occupation as a significant factor influencing consumer behavior and preferences in the context of technology products. This consistency in results underscores the relevance and impact of occupational roles in shaping consumer perceptions and intentions.

- The distribution of monthly household income paints a diverse economic landscape among the respondents. Approximately 30.1% report a monthly income below 25000 INR, with a similar percentage (30.0%) falling within the 25000 to 50000 INR bracket. Moreover, 22.2% report an income ranging from 50000 to 100000 INR, while 17.7% report a monthly income exceeding 1 lakh

INR. This economic diversity offers valuable insights into the purchasing power and consumer behavior of individuals across various income brackets. Upon conducting the ANOVA analysis, it was revealed that income level does not prove to be significant factor influencing respondents' perceptions and intentions towards smartphone brands. This suggests that individuals, irrespective of their income bracket, generally hold similar attitudes and intentions in the context of smartphone brands. These findings align with previous research by Smith and Ng (2018), which also concluded that income level did not exert a significant influence on consumer behavior towards technology products. This consistency in results highlights that certain factors may hold universal sway over consumer preferences and intentions, regardless of income levels. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and targeting these shared factors in marketing strategies, irrespective of the economic background of the target audience.

- On analyzing the data for the social media platforms most frequently utilized by respondents for product and smartphone reviews, it was found that Facebook was the predominant platform in the term of usage (30.8%), followed by Instagram (36.6%) due to its visual-centric nature and popularity among younger demographics. YouTube also garnered substantial attention (13.8%) for it's in-depth video reviews. Twitter (7.7%) proved valuable for quick updates, while LinkedIn (11.0%) found a niche in professional insights. Interestingly, Pinterest did not feature in respondents' preferences for reviews. For businesses, this highlights the importance of visual content, user-generated reviews, and video content on dominant platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Twitter's real-time updates and LinkedIn's professional insights also hold value. Understanding these platform preferences enables businesses to tailor their strategies for maximum audience engagement.
- For finding out the reasons why respondents use Instagram, the major findings indicate that a significant majority (43.79%) utilize the platform to access information on new products, highlighting Instagram role as a key source for product updates. Moreover, a notable portion also engages in expressing opinions (22.84%) and maintaining social connections (16.57%). Additionally, a smaller yet noteworthy segment uses Instagram for leisure (7.06%) and networking (5.13%). Recognizing these trends, businesses should prioritize showcasing new products, fostering community engagement, encouraging feedback, providing engaging

content, and tailoring marketing efforts for business promotion. Overall, understanding these motivations empowers businesses to refine their Instagram presence for a more impactful and meaningful engagement with their audience.

- The study offers crucial insights into the smartphone brands followed by respondents on Instagram. Among the notable findings, Apple stands out with the highest following, accounting for 46% of respondents. This indicates a substantial interest and fan base for Apple products within this sample. Following closely, Samsung enjoys a significant 30% following, highlighting strong brand presence and interest in Samsung products among respondents. One Plus and Redmi also command noteworthy followings at 16% and 7%, respectively, showcasing considerable interest in these brands. Meanwhile, Lava, with 1% following, demonstrates a comparatively lower level of interest or brand presence. Overall, this data underscores the importance of maintaining an engaging Instagram presence for smartphone brands, particularly for Apple and Samsung. Additionally, it offers opportunities for brands like One Plus and Redmi to effectively engage with their audience and amplify their brand presence. For Lava, there exists potential for growth by enhancing their Instagram presence and delivering compelling content. Understanding these following trends is pivotal for brands to refine their content strategies, assess their performance relative to competitors, and identify collaboration opportunities for heightened brand engagement on the platform.
- The data on purchase venues reveals important consumer preferences in acquiring smartphones. Online purchases account for 36.1% of respondents, underscoring the growing popularity and convenience of digital shopping channels. It's imperative for smartphone brands and retailers to prioritize their online presence, ensuring user-friendly interfaces and secure transactions to effectively serve this consumer segment. On the other hand, a substantial majority of 63.9% still prefer buying smartphones through offline channels. This highlights the enduring significance of physical stores. To cater to this consumer base, brands should concentrate on crafting engaging in-store experiences and providing knowledgeable staff to assist customers in making informed decisions. Balancing efforts between online and offline strategies will be crucial for brands to effectively address the diverse purchasing choices of their consumer base.
- The data on smartphone replacement frequencies provides crucial insights into

consumer behavior. A small percentage, 6.4%, opt for replacing their smartphones within a year, indicating a preference for staying up-to-date with the latest technology. This highlights a competitive market where frequent product updates and innovations are crucial for brands to cater to this segment effectively. Another group, 9.4%, adheres to a yearly replacement cycle, emphasizing the need for regular product launches and marketing strategies that highlight the latest features and improvements. The highest percentage, 37.0%, changes their smartphones every two years, presenting an opportunity for brands to target this segment with products designed for longevity, reliability, and enduring value. Additionally, a significant portion, 24.9%, follows a three- year replacement cycle, signaling a need for brands to emphasize durability, quality, and long-lasting battery life to meet these consumers' preferences. Lastly, 22.3% of respondents keep their smartphones for four or more years, suggesting an audience that values product durability, regular software updates, and sustainable features. Overall, understanding these replacement patterns enables brands to customize their product offerings and marketing strategies to effectively address the diverse preferences of their intended audience.

- The data on weekly internet usage patterns among respondents offers essential insights for smartphone brands. Nearly a third of respondents (29.0%) spend less than 15 hours per week online, indicating a segment that may not heavily rely on online platforms for product research or purchases. For this group, brands should consider a diverse range of marketing channels to effectively reach them. Another significant portion (33.8%) spends 15 to 30 hours online weekly, representing a substantial online presence likely to engage with digital marketing efforts. Additionally, a quarter of respondents (25.3%) engage in online activities for 30 to 50 hours per week, indicating a highly engaged segment that is likely to be influenced by digital marketing efforts. Lastly, a smaller segment (12.0%) spends more than 50 hours online weekly, signifying a digitally savvy group that is a key target for online marketing strategies. Therefore, maintaining a robust online presence, coupled with excellent offline customer experiences, is crucial. Continuous innovation and regular product updates are vital to cater to consumers who prefer frequent smartphone replacements. Providing a diverse array of products which features different attributes and price ranges to attract consumers with different replacement cycles. Tailoring marketing strategies to reach

consumers with diverse internet usage habits is essential for effective engagement. In conclusion, comprehending the purchase profile and internet usage habits of consumers provides valuable insights for smartphone brands to refine their product offerings and marketing strategies, ultimately meeting the diverse preferences and behaviors of their target audience.

2) To examine the effect of e-WoM on Purchase Intention of consumers for Smartphone brands

In the ever-evolving digital landscape, electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) has risen as a potent influencer of consumer behavior, particularly within the fiercely competitive smartphone industry. As online platforms continue to serve as hubs for information exchange and social interaction, comprehending the extent of e-WoM's impact on consumer purchase intention becomes a critical pursuit for businesses. To rigorously explore this dynamic, we employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through Smart PLS 4.3, a sophisticated statistical technique adept at untangling complex relationships between variables. Through this advanced methodology, we gained profound insights into the intricate interplay between e-WoM and purchase intention, providing a robust foundation for our study.

- Our research affirms that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) has a substantial impact on Purchase Intention (Std. Beta = 0.328, p = 0.001). Consumers who actively engage in online discussions, reviews, and recommendations are more likely to express a stronger intention to buy goods or services linked with a brand.
- e-WoM serves as a significant reservoir of information for consumers. Positive reviews and recommendations from peers build trust and credibility, alleviating uncertainty in the purchase decision. As consumers increasingly seek authentic experiences, they rely on E-WOM to gauge product quality and brand reputation.
- Consumers often view brands as part of a larger community. Engaging in E-WOM activities nurtures a feeling of inclusion and encourages people to support and invest in the brand, leading to a higher purchase intention.
- Electronic word of mouth expands the scope of traditional word of mouth. Online platforms facilitate rapid dissemination of opinions to a global audience. Consequently, the influence of e-WoM on purchase intention is magnified compared to offline word-of-mouth.
- Cheung & Thadani's (2012) study, along with Smith et al.'s (2012) research, both corroborate our own findings by affirming that electronic word of mouth

significantly impacts intention to buy goods. Their studies provide robust empirical evidence supporting the notion that online discussions and recommendations play a pivotal role in influencing consumers' intentions to acquire the product. Moreover, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) contribute valuable insights into the trust-building aspect of E-WOM, aligning with our own reasoning behind the findings. Their research highlights how positive e-WoM fosters trustworthiness and reduces uncertainty, further supporting the observed influence on purchase intention. Additionally, Chen et al.'s (2011) study emphasizes the importance of community and involvement, reinforcing our understanding that active participation in online discussions creates a sense of belonging and positively impacts purchase intention. Finally, Cialdini's (1984) seminal work on social proof provides a psychological foundation for our findings. His theory explains why individuals tend to follow the actions of others, validating our conclusion that e-WoM functions as a form of social proof that significantly influences consumer behavior and purchase intentions. Collectively, these studies bolster the robustness and generalizability of our findings regarding the impact of e-WoM on purchase intention.

- Implementing a robust online reputation management strategy is crucial for businesses to maintain a positive brand image. This involves actively monitoring and addressing both positive and negative feedback, ensuring that online discussions reflect favorably on the brand. Additionally, companies should focus on Engagement Strategies, creating platforms for customer interaction and advocacy. This fosters a sense of community and strengthens customer loyalty. Incentivizing Advocacy can further encourage customers to become brand advocates, driving more e-WoM discussions. Prompt monitoring and response to customer queries and feedback is essential to demonstrate attentiveness and build trust. Lastly, integrating e-WoM efforts with broader marketing strategies ensures a uniform image of the brand across every channel, reinforcing the positive impact of e-WoM on purchase intentions. By implementing these suggestions, businesses can effectively leverage the influence of e-WoM to enhance their overall marketing and brand-building efforts. All in all, understanding the influential impact of e-WoM in purchase intention allows businesses to leverage this powerful tool to enhance brand appeal and drive sales. This aligns with evolving consumer behavior in the digital age, making it a strategic imperative for businesses across industries.

3) To Assess the Influence of e-WoM on BrandImage

Understanding the influence of e-WoM on brand image is crucial in today's digital landscape. e-WoM encompasses the online conversations, reviews, and recommendations that significantly impact how consumers perceive a brand. In this study, we thoroughly examine the intricate relationship between e-WoM and brand image, aiming to uncover the degree to which online discussions influence the overall perception of a brand. The forthcoming findings of this research will illuminate the pivotal role that e-WoM plays in shaping brand image, offering actionable insights for businesses aiming to enhance their online presence and reputation.

- The study demonstrates a strong and statistically significant relation between e-WoM and brand image. This means that consumers' perceptions of a brand are notably impacted by online conversations, reviews, and recommendations. This finding substantiates the notion that the digital realm plays a vital role in molding how consumers perceive and interact with brands.
- The study underscores the considerable influence of positive online recommendations, reviews, and discussions on brand perception. When consumers encounter favorable feedback and endorsements about a brand in online spaces, it significantly contributes to forming a positive image of that brand. Conversely, negative e-WoM can adversely impact brand image. This highlights the importance of actively managing and responding to online conversations to safeguard and bolster brand reputation.
- The high standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) of 0.646, along with a low p-value of 0.004 and a substantial t-value of 25.695, further confirm the strength and importance of the relationship between e-WoM and brand image. This statistical robustness indicates that the influence of electronic word of mouth on brand perception is not merely coincidental, but a substantial and reliable factor that businesses must consider in their brand management strategies.
- The current findings align closely with the conclusions of Smith et al., further consolidating the understanding that electronic word-of-mouth plays a critical role in shaping brand image. Their research, like ours, emphasizes the importance of managing and leveraging online conversations for positive brand perception. The results of Lee & Youn's study resonate with our findings, providing additional

support for the influential impact of e-WoM on brand image. Their research reinforces the notion that consumers' perceptions of a brand are significantly shaped by what is being said about it in digital spaces.

- The results of the research hold significant implications for businesses aiming to improve their brand image through e-WoM. It underscores the critical importance of actively managing their online reputation. This involves not only monitoring conversations about their brand but also proactively engaging with customers, addressing concerns, and fostering a positive user-generated content environment. Moreover, cultivating a community of brand advocates can significantly contribute to the organic generation of positive e-WoM. Businesses should also acknowledge the substantial influence of online reviews and recommendations and should seek to prompt satisfied consumers to narrate their experiences. Collaborating with influencers can also amplify positive e-WoM. Additionally, creating a user-friendly and interactive online platform can facilitate and enhance customer reviews and discussions. Lastly, businesses should remain adaptable and responsive to changing trends and sentiments in digital spaces. Overall, comprehending the impact of e-WoM on brand image provides businesses with actionable insights to shape effective online marketing and reputation management strategies.

In short, the current study emphasizes the substantial impact of electronic word of mouth on brand image. The findings emphasize the crucial role of digital discussions, reviews, and recommendations in shaping how consumers perceive a brand. Businesses are urged to actively engage in online spaces, monitor their reputation, and foster positive user-generated content. This not only enhances brand image but also strengthens the connection with the target audience. Adapting to evolving digital trends is essential for success. Incorporating these insights into marketing strategies empowers businesses to leverage e-WoM for positive consumer behaviour.

4) To examine the influence of e-WoM on Value Co-Creation by consumers.

In today's digitally connected world, the phenomenon of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) has revolutionized the manner in which customers interact with brands and participate value creation process. This research explores the intriguing e-WoM and its profound impact on Value Co-Creation by consumers. In an era where online

conversations and recommendations wield significant influence, understanding how e-WoM affects the collaborative value generation process is crucial for businesses aiming to succeed in the modern business environment. Analyzing the results of this study provides valuable insights into the intricacies of consumer-brand engagements in the digital era, shedding light on the intricate connection between e-WoM and the cooperative generation of value

- e-WoM, with a standardized coefficient (Std. Beta) of0.421, a t-value of12.194, and a low associated p-value of 0.002, significantly influences Value Co-Creation.
- Consumers who engage in E-WoM typically exhibit a deeper interest and attachment to the brand. This heightened affinity is a driving force behind their inclination to actively contribute to value co-creation efforts.
- Through the act of sharing opinions and recommendations, consumers demonstrate not only their interest but also a readiness to play a role in enriching the brand's ecosystem. This participation extends beyond passive consumption, contributing actively to the value creationprocess.
- e-WoM nurtures a sense of community among consumers. This shared space for dialogue and exchange of ideas fosters trust and camaraderie, creating an environment conducive to collaborative value generation.
- Engaged consumers perceive themselves as stakeholders in the value creation process. Their contributions are seen as integral to the brand's offerings, further solidifying their commitment to participating in co-creation efforts.
- To enhance value co-creation with consumers, businesses can take strategic steps. Firstly, fostering online communitiesoffers a platform for consumers to freely share their opinions and actively participate in co-creation endeavors. Secondly, creating dedicated platforms for feedback and suggestions allows consumers to directly contribute to thevalue creation process. Additionally, acknowledging and rewarding these contributions not only strengthens brand- consumer relationships but also incentivizes continued engagement. Moreover, leveraging the insights garnered from electronic word of mouth and value co- creation activities can inform product development and innovation strategies, ensuring alignment with consumer preferences. Lastly, establishing measurable metrics for value co-creation efforts and transparently communicating the benefits to consumers establishes a feedback loop, reinforcing the value of their contributions. By

implementing these strategies, businesses can foster a collaborative environment that mutually benefits both consumers and the brand.

In nutshell, it can be said that to enhance value co-creation with consumers, businesses can take strategic steps. Firstly, fostering online communities offers a platform for consumers to freely share their opinions and actively participate in co- creation endeavours. Secondly, creating dedicated platforms for feedback and suggestions allows consumers to directly contribute to the value creation process. Additionally, acknowledging and rewarding these contributions not only strengthens brand- consumer relationships but also incentivizes continued engagement. Moreover, leveraging the insights garnered from electronic word-of-mouth and value co-creation activities can inform product development and innovation strategies, ensuring alignment with consumer preferences. Lastly, establishing measurable metrics for value co-creation efforts and transparently communicating the benefits to consumers establishes a feedback loop, reinforcing the value of their contributions. By implementing these strategies, businesses can foster a collaborative environment that mutually benefits both consumers and the brand.

5) To examine the mediating influence of Brand Image and Value Co-Creation between E-WOM and Purchase Intentions

This research delves into the complex connections between the constructs. Electronic word of mouth represents digital conversations, reviews, and recommendations about a brand. Brand Image captures consumer perceptions and associations with a brand, while Value Co-Creation signifies the collaborative process of value generation. These factors collectively impact Purchase Intentions, influencing consumer choices. By investigating the mediating roles of Brand Image and Value Co- Creation, this study purposes to uncover the underlying mechanisms that govern consumer decision-making in the realm of e-WoM. This research offers valuable perspectives for businesses looking to refine their marketing strategies in the digital commerce landscape.

a. e-WOM -> Brand Image (BI) -> Purchase Intentions (PI):

- The research revealed that e-WoM has a substantial influence on brand image. The path coefficient from e-WoM to Brand Image is 0.646, indicating a positive and substantial influence. This means that electronic word-of-mouth significantly shapes consumers' perceptions and associations with a brand. Consumers rely

on online recommendations and discussions to form opinions about brands. Positive e-WoM can lead to favorable brand impressions, highlighting the power of online conversations in influencing consumer perceptions.

- Further brand image positively influences purchase intentions. The path coefficient from brand image to purchase intentions is 0.258, signifying a meaningful impact. Consumers' perceptions of a brand directly affect their intention to make a purchase. A positive brand image builds trust and confidence in consumers. When they hold a favorable perception of a brand, they are more likely to consider purchasing its products or services.
- e-WoM indirectly influences purchase intentions through brand image. The indirect effect, computed as the product of 'a' and 'b', is 0.167. This indicates that a significant portion of the influence of e-WoM on Purchase Intentions is mediated by Brand Image. This implies that the impact of e-WoM on purchase intentions is not only direct but is also channeled through the lens of brand perception. Positive e-WoM contributes to a positive brand image, resulting in higher purchase intentions.
- Again, it was found that both e-WoM and brand image contribute to purchase intentions. The total effect, considering both direct and indirect effects, is 0.495. This means that approximately 49.5% of the variance in Purchase Intentions is accounted for by e-WoM and Brand Image. This shows that both factors play a substantial role in driving consumer purchase intentions. A positive brand image alone may not be enough; it needs to be complemented by positive electronic word-of-mouth to have the greatest impact on purchase intentions.
- The Variance Accounted For (VAF) is 34%, indicating that e-WoM and Brand Image together contributes to 34% of the variance in Purchase Intentions. This implies partial mediation. While both e-WoM and Brand Image have significant individual effects on purchase intentions, they also work together. This suggests that while brand image is a crucial factor, it doesn't entirely replace the influence of e-WoM.
- Several studies align with the results of this study on the mediating influence of Brand Image and Value Co-Creation between e-WoM and Purchase Intentions. Gummeruset al. (2012) demonstrated that e-WoM significantly contributes to value co-creation, supporting the notion that engaged consumers significantly contribute

in this process. Payne et al. (2008) further corroborate our results by showing the positive impact of e-WoM on collaborative value creation. Additionally, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) laid the foundation for co- creation theory, emphasizing the importance of engaged consumers in value co- creation, which resonates with our findings. Vargo and Lusch (2008) introduced the service-dominant logic framework, underlining the significance of collaboration between consumers and brands in value creation, further supporting our results. Lastly, Füller et al. (2009) highlighted the involvement of active consumers in value co-creation processes, aligning closely with our findings. These studies collectively reinforce the notion that e-WoM, brand image, and value co-creation are interconnected elements that influence consumer purchase intentions in a mutually reinforcing manner.

- Companies should prioritize managing their online reputation and fostering positive electronic word-of-mouth, as it directly impacts Brand Image and subsequently influences Purchase Intentions. Cultivating active online communities and providing platforms for consumer participation can enhance Value Co-Creation, which, in turn, positively affects Purchase Intentions. Additionally, acknowledging and rewarding consumers for their contributions to Value Co-Creation can strengthen brand-consumer relationships. Lastly, businesses should leverage insights from electronic word-of-mouth and Value Co-Creation activities to inform product development and innovation strategies, as these aspects collectively contribute to nearly 34% of the variance in Purchase Intentions. In summary, understanding and actively engaging with these interconnected elements can lead to improved Purchase Intentions and overall business success.

b. e-WoM -> Value Co-Creation (VC) -> Purchase Intentions(PI):

- The research confirms a favorable and substantial association between e-WoM and value co-creation with purchase intentions. This indicates that consumers who engage in online discussions and contribute to value co-creation are more inclined to express their intention to make a purchase.
- The results highlight that value co-creation partially mediates the impact of e-WoM on purchase intentions. This means that a substantial portion of the influence of e-WoM on purchase intentions is channeled through the collaborative value

creation process.

- Consumers who actively participate in e-WoM are likely to be more engaged with the brand. This increased engagement can lead to collaborative value creation, as these consumers feel a stronger connection and sense of ownership towards the brand.
- Value Co-Creation involves a collaborative process where both consumers and the brand contribute to creating value. When consumers engage in e-WoM, they demonstrate a curiosity in the brand's offerings, increasing their likelihood to participate in co-creation activities.
- Engaging in VCC activities can enhance consumers' perceptions of the brand. This positive brand perception, in turn, contributes to their intention to make a purchase.
- Value Co-Creation nurtures feeling of trust and partnership among consumers and the brand. This trust is likely to positively influence consumers' purchase intentions, as they feel confident in the brand's offerings.
- Participating in value co-creation empowers consumers and involves them in the brand's ecosystem. This sense of involvement leads to a higher likelihood of intending to make a purchase.
- Consistent studies supporting these findings include Gummerus et al. (2012), who established that e-WoM significantly contributes to value co-creation, aligning with the mediation effect observed in this study. Payne et al. (2008) similarly corroborates the positive influence of e-WoM on collaborative value creation, reinforcing the results presented here. Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) foundational research on co-creation theory establishes a broader theoretical context for comprehending the interconnectedness of brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intentions. Additionally, Vargo and Lusch's (2008) service-dominant logic framework emphasizes the collaborative aspect of value creation, supporting the mediating role of value co-creation between e-WoM and purchase intentions. Füller et al. (2009) shed light on the active participation of customers in value co-creation processes, further substantiating the findings that consumers engaged in e-WoM are more prone to engage in value co- creation, ultimately influencing purchase intentions.
- These findings hold significant implications for businesses aiming to improve

their brand-consumer relationships and stimulate purchase intentions. Firstly, recognizing the importance of electronic word of mouth in influencing both value co-creation and purchase intentions underscores the importance of cultivating a positive online reputation. Brands should actively engage with online communities, address consumer feedback, and encourage positive reviews. Secondly, understanding the mediating function of VCC emphasizes the need to create platforms and initiatives that facilitate consumer participation in the brand's ecosystem. This can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes, where consumers feel valued and heard, fostering stronger brand loyalty. Additionally, businesses should focus on nurturing a favorable brand image, as it directly impacts consumers' purchase intentions. Acknowledging and rewarding consumer contributions to value co-creation can further strengthen brand- consumer relationships. Lastly, utilizing insights gained from electronic word- of-mouth and value co-creation activities can inform product development strategies, driving innovation and meeting consumer needs more effectively. Overall, these findings emphasize the need for a holistic and consumer-centric approach in brand management, leveraging the power of digital interactions to drive brand success.

5.3 Managerial Implications

The findings suggest practical strategies to capitalize on the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) on consumers' purchase intentions. These implications provide actionable steps for organizations to enhance their online presence and effectively utilize e-WoM channels.

- Identify and prioritize platforms with a high positive e-WoM impact. This involves conducting thorough market research to understand which social media channels and online forums are most influential in shaping consumer opinions.
- Allocate resources for managing and encouraging discussions, reviews, and recommendations. This may involve dedicating specific teams or personnel to monitor and actively engage with consumers on these platforms.
- Invest in online advertising on platforms where e-WoM significantly influences purchase intentions. This entails aligning advertising efforts with platforms that have a high likelihood of reaching and resonating with the target audience influenced by e-WoM.
- Customize e-WoM campaigns to resonate with specific demographic groups

identified as more responsive. This involves crafting messages, content formats, and engagementstrategies that align with thepreferences and behaviors of different consumer segments.

- Regularly track and manage online conversations to safeguard brand image. Implementing advanced social listening tools can help businesses stay on top of discussions related to their brand, allowing for timely responses to both positive and negative feedback.
- Swiftly address negative feedback to mitigate potential reputational damage.This requires establishing protocols for addressing customer complaints or negative reviews in a timely and constructive manner.
- Foster an environment that motivates satisfied customers to share positive experiences, contributing to a favorable brand image. This can be achieved through various means such as incentivizing UGC, featuring customer stories on official channels, and creating dedicated spaces for user testimonials.
- Highlight positive customer testimonials and reviews in marketing collateral and on digital platforms. This involves integrating authentic customer feedback into promotional materials, website content, and product descriptions to build trust and credibility.
- Provide avenues for consumers to contribute ideas and feedback, fostering an environment of value co-creation. Establishing online forums, surveys, or dedicated feedback channels can encourage users to actively engage in the brand's product development and improvement processes.
- Engage consumers in product development and innovation processes through crowdsourcing campaigns and contests. This involves inviting consumers to share their ideas, preferences, and suggestions, which can be integrated into the brand's product offerings.
- Recognize and reward customers for their active participation in value co- creation efforts. Implementing loyalty programs, exclusive offers, or recognition systems can incentivize consumers to continue contributing to the brand's value creation initiatives.
- Allocate resources to enhance initiatives focused on building a positive brand image. This may involve investing in activities such as public relations, influencer partnerships, and content creation to reinforce the brand's desired image.

- Actively engage with consumers in value co-creation efforts through various platforms and initiatives. This requires creating spaces and opportunities for consumers to collaborate with the brand, such as ideation sessions, co-design projects, or beta-testing programs.
- Utilize demographic insights to personalize marketing efforts, recognizing varying responses to brand image and value co-creation. By tailoring messages, offers, and experiences to specific consumer segments, businesses can enhance their relevance and effectiveness in engaging with their audience.

These implications collectively guide organizations towards optimizing their strategies for engaging with consumers through electronic word-of-mouth, building brand image, and fostering value co-creation. By implementing these strategies, businesses can enhance their online presence, strengthen consumer relationships, and ultimately drive purchase intentions.

5.4 Social Implications

The results of the study have significant social implications, which include:

By emphasizing the influence of e-WoM, the study underscores the power of individual consumers in shaping market perceptions. This empowers its users to express their perspectives and experiences, creating a more democratic marketplace.

- The study highlights how e-WoM significantly affects consumers' purchase intentions. This indicates that individuals are increasingly relying on peer opinions and online discussions to inform their purchasing decisions, potentially leading to more informed and satisfactory choices.
- The research suggests that creating and nurturing online communities where consumers actively participate in discussions and value co-creation can be highly advantageous for consumers as well as for brands. This fosters a sense of belonging and mutual benefit within these communities.
- The study emphasizes the role of VCC, indicating that consumers are not passive recipients of products and services but active collaborators in their creation. This suggests a shift towards more participatory business models and an increased emphasis on customer-centric innovation.
- Understanding the significance of online platforms for consumer opinions and value co-creation underscores the prominence of digital inclusivity. It suggests that businesses should ensure accessibility and user-friendly experiences for all consumers, regardless of their digital proficiency.

- With the growing influence of e-WoM on brand image, businesses are encouraged to prioritize authenticity and social responsibility in their interactions with consumers. This implies a need for transparency, ethical practices, and genuine engagement in online spaces.
- Recognizing the varying responses across demographic segments underscores the importance of inclusive marketing strategies. Brands should aim to represent and engage with a diverse range of consumers to ensure their messaging is relatable and relevant to all audiences.
- The study suggests that consumers are ready to to actively participate in VCC. This creates an opportunity for businesses to leverage customer feedback for continuous improvement and innovation, ultimately leading to products and services that better meet consumer needs.
- The reliance on e-WoM and online interactions for consumer decision-making calls for efforts to enhance digital literacy and consumer education. Ensuring that individuals have the skills and knowledge to navigate online spaces effectively is crucial for making informed choices.

Overall, the study's social implications highlight a shift towards a more consumer- centric, collaborative, and digitally engaged marketplace. It emphasizes the need for businesses to prioritize authentic engagement, inclusivity, and responsiveness to consumer feedback in their operations and marketing strategies.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively examined the dynamics of consumer behavior in the context of smartphone brands, with a specific focus on electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM), brand image, value co-creation, and purchase intention. The study established that credibility, homophily, information quality, and valence significantly influence e-WoM, underscoring the importance of trustworthiness, shared interests, content quality, and sentiment in shaping online consumer discussions. Moreover, e-WoM was found to exert a substantial impact on brand image and value co-creation, highlighting the role of consumer-generated content in shaping brand perception and collaborative interactions between consumers and brands. Furthermore, the study revealed that e-WoM significantly influences purchase intention, emphasizing the influential role of online word-of-mouth in driving consumer purchasing decisions. Additionally, brand image and value co-creation were identified as significant predictors of

purchase intention, underscoring their importance in shaping consumers' intentions to buy. These insights provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying consumer decision-making processes in the digital era. For industry practitioners, the study offers actionable insights into developing more effective marketing strategies for smartphone brands. By focusing on enhancing credibility, fostering shared interests among consumers, delivering high-quality content, and leveraging positive sentiment in online discussions, businesses can strengthen brand perception, stimulate value co-creation, and ultimately drive purchase intention.

5.5.1 SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Subsequent studies should focus on the nuances of e-WoM across various platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, recognizing that each platform has unique dynamics and user behaviors that influence e-WoM effectiveness.
- Understanding the lasting impact of e-WoM on brand loyalty and customer behavior over time is crucial for businesses, necessitating longitudinal studies that track e-WoM influence.
- Investigating the effectiveness of e-WoM generated by influencer on consumer behavior and brand perception is essential, considering the growing role of influencers in shaping consumer opinions.
- Conducting studies focused on specific industries (e.g., fashion, technology, healthcare) can reveal sector-specific trends and patterns in e-WoM influence.
- With the swift advancement of technology, upcoming studies can assess the impact of evolving platforms (e.g., virtual reality, augmented reality) on e-WoM dynamics and AI (Artificial Intelligence) powered e-WoM can also be studied by future researchers.

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Appendices

QUESTIONNAIRE

	Part A: Demographic Profile
Q1	Name_____
Q2	EMAIL_____
Q3	Age (Years)- a. Less than 20 years b. 20-30 c. 30-40 d. 40-50 e. More than 50
Q4	Gender- a. Male b. Female
Q5	Qualification- a. Secondary b. High School c. Diploma d. Graduate e. Post Graduate f. Doctorate
Q6	Occupation- a. Government Employee b. Professional c. Business d. Unemployed e. Student
Q7	Monthly household income (in INR) a. Less than 25000 b. 25000-50000 c. 50000-100000 d. More than 1 lakh
Q8	Which social media platforms do you use for product/ smartphone review? a. Facebook b. Twitter c. YouTube d. LinkedIn e. Pinterest f. Instagram
Q9	From the list below select top three reasons why you use Instagram? a. To stay in touch with friends b. To stay updated about new products/ films/ news/songs c. To fill up spare time d. To meet new people

	e. To share my opinion f. To promote/expand business
Q10	Which smartphone brand you follow on Instagram? a. Apple b. Samsung c. Xiaomi d. Vivo e. Oppo
Q11	From where do you usually buy a smartphone? a. Online b. Offline
Q12	On an average how frequently do you change or buy a new smartphone? a. Less than a year b. Once a year c. Every Two years d. Three years e. Four or more years
Q13	Number of hours spend on internet per week- a. Less than 15 b. 15-30 c. 30-50 d. Above 50

Part B. Measuring Electronic Word of Mouth (Homophily, Credibility, Quality, Valence)

Q14 Give rating from 1 to 5 (1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neither Agree or Disagree/Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree) for the following statements regarding e-WoM messages on Instagram reflecting **Electronic Word of Mouth (**e-WoM).

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	I often read other consumers' post on Instagram page about smartphone brands so that I make a right choice of brand/ product to purchase					
2.	I often look for other consumers' post on Instagram page of smartphone brands to know which model and features of smartphone makes good impression on others					
3.	.I frequently consider e-WoM , when i have no or little knowledge about the smartphone					
4.	I usually discuss about my purchasing activity (date, brand, model, colour, location etc.) on the Instagram					

5.	If any of my friends or members of smartphone page have shared their purchase experience then it's very likely that I will comment or participate in further discussion on Instagram					
6.	If any of my friends or other people of smartphone page have shared their purchase experience then it's very likely that I will post the same on my Instagram account					

Q15 Give rating from1 to 5 (1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree) regarding the **Credibility** of information being shared on Instagram pages of smartphone brands.

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	I believe that the information shared at Instagram is true					
2.	I believe that the information shared on Instagram is useful and precise					
3.	I believe that the information shared at Instagram page is factual					
4.	I believe that the information shared at Instagram page is unbiased					

Q16 Give rating from1 to 5 (1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree) regarding **Information Quality** at Instagram page of the smartphone brand

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	Information shared on Instagram related to smartphones is up-to-date					
2.	Information shared on Instagram regarding smartphones is both complete and informative.					
3.	Information shared on Instagram about smartphones is irrelevant					

Q17 Give rating from 1 to 5 [1= Extremely Unlikely (EU), 2=Unlikely (U), 3 Neutral (N), 4=Likely (L), 5=Extremely likely (EL)) for **Homophily** on Instagram page of smartphone brands

No.	Statement	EU	U	N	L	EL

1.	I rely more on the reviews given by people of my age group.					
2.	I rely more on the reviews of people who are of my profession/business/ work					
4	I do not rely on the reviews by people who have different social status					
4	I do not rely on the reviews by people whose interest does not matches with me					

Q18

Give rating from1 to 5 (1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree) regarding **Valence** (positive or/ and negative information/ reviews) available at Instagram page of the smartphone brand

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	I undoubtedly purchase the product by seeing positive information					
2.	I look for other alternative brands after reading negative information					
3.	I rely on the consistent reviews whether positive or negative.					
4.	I can easily take my purchase decision after seeing the low or high ratings					

Part C: Measuring Impact of e-WoM on Purchase Intention through Brand Image and Value Co-Creation.

Q19

Give rating from1 to 5 (1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree) for the influence that Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) has on **Brand Image** and later on the influence Brand Image has on Purchase Intention. (Brand image is basically the view of customers about the brand)

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	e-WoM on brand describe the smartphone brand's worth					
2.	e-WoM on brand describes the smartphone brand's effectiveness					
3.	e-WoM on brand makes the smartphone brand attractive toward the consumers.					
4.	e-WoM on brand makes the consumers curious to buy it					
5.	e-WoM on brand describes about the quality of the smartphone					
6.	Negative e-WoM on brand describe the brand's inefficiency					

Q20 Give rating from1 to 5 [1= Not at all Influenced (NI), 2=Slightly Influenced (SI), 3= Somewhat Influential (I), 4= Very Influential (VI), 5= Extremely Influential (EI)]for the influence that Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) has on **Purchase Intention**)

No.	Statement	NI	SI	I	VI	EI
1.	I only get influenced by the information shared by the old consumers					
2.	I only get influenced to purchase the smartphone if the information is being shared by the active Instagram users					
3.	I would buy the smartphone of the X brand, no matter what other consumers have to say					
4.	I will only buy the smartphone if a lot of people on Instagram are saying positive about it					
5.	I will buy the smartphone of X brand in future too					

Q21 Give your rating from 1 to 5 (1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Neither Agree or Disagree/Neutral, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree) for **Value Co-Creation** (VCC).

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	If I have a good experience with brand, I will comment about it on Instagram					
2.	If I experience a problem with the smartphone brand, I will let the					

		brand know about it through social Instagram					
	3.	If I get smartphone as per my expectations, I recommend the brand to my friends through Instagram					
	4.	I will assist my friends or other customers if they need my help in selecting the smartphone through Instagram					
	5.	If smartphone of my choice is currently out of stock, I will prefer to wait					
	6.	If I have an idea on improving the smartphone, I will share with the brand through Instagram					