

WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING STRATEGY AND ITS IMPACT ON PURCHASING DECISIONS

Feliks Anggia Binsar Kristian Panjaitan

Universitas Halu Oleo, Indonesia

E-mail: felikscp23@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to systematically examine Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) strategies and their impact on consumer purchasing decisions. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study analyzes various relevant academic literature in the 2015–2025 time period, including indexed journals and scientific books. The study results show that WOMM is an effective strategy in influencing purchasing decisions, especially through three main impact channels: cognitive (consumer knowledge), affective (attitudes and perceptions), and conative (purchasing intentions and actions). Commonly used strategies include share-worthy content, consumer reviews, online communities, and utilizing social media. The effectiveness of WOMM is influenced by industry factors, demographic characteristics, and the level of consumer involvement in the product or service. These findings have theoretical implications in the development of consumer behavior studies and practical implications for business people in designing marketing strategies that are more authentic and based on consumer experience. WOMM has proven to be not just a promotional tool, but a direct reflection of the quality of the relationship between a brand and its customers.

Keywords: Word of Mouth Marketing, Purchasing Decisions, Marketing Strategy

INTRODUCTION

In an era of increasingly fierce business competition, marketing strategy has become one of the key elements in determining the success of a company. Marketing not only functions to introduce products to consumers, but also as a tool to shape perceptions, create loyalty, and encourage purchasing decisions (Dermawan & Barkah, 2023). In the modern business world, companies are required to not only compete on product quality, but also on how they convey the value of those products to consumers.

One marketing strategy that is increasingly receiving attention is Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM), namely promotions that occur naturally through communication between consumers. WOMM has the advantage of

being considered more credible and trusted by consumers than traditional advertising, because it comes from the real experience of previous users. Consumers tend to trust recommendations from people closest to them or other users more than information provided directly by the company (Maley, 2024).

In its development, WOMM has experienced a significant transformation along with advances in digital technology and the emergence of social media. This development gave birth to a new form of WOMM known as electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), where consumers can easily share their experiences and opinions with a wide audience via the internet. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and discussion forums have become the main forum for spreading consumer influence on other people's purchasing decisions (Dao et al., 2024).

This change in the marketing communications landscape has had a major impact on consumer behavior. Today's consumers are more actively looking for reviews, testimonials and recommendations online before making purchasing decisions. They are also more responsive to content that they feel is authentic and relevant to their needs (Ningrum & Indayani, 2023). Therefore, WOMM not only influences the final stage of purchase, but can also influence brand awareness, interest and product preferences.

In this context, purchasing decision making becomes an increasingly complex process and is influenced by various social and psychological factors. Trust in information sources is a determining factor in choosing products or services. Therefore, an effective WOMM strategy is able to create emotional involvement and significantly strengthen consumer purchasing intentions.

A number of studies show that WOMM has a positive correlation with purchasing decisions, both in the goods and services sectors. However, the effectiveness of this strategy is also influenced by many factors, such as consumer characteristics, product type, communication channels used, and the quality of the message conveyed (Nguyen, 2022). Therefore, a deep understanding of how WOMM works and its impact on consumer decisions is very important for further study.

A literature review regarding WOMM and its influence on purchasing decisions can provide a significant contribution, both in the development of marketing theory and practice. From an academic perspective, this study can enrich scientific insight regarding consumer behavior and marketing communication strategies (Nguyen, 2022). Meanwhile, from a practical side, the results of the study can be an important reference for business people in

designing marketing strategies that are more effective and in line with current consumer behavior trends.

Based on the description above, a study of Word of Mouth Marketing strategies and their impact on purchasing decisions is very relevant to carry out. Through this literature study, it is hoped that patterns, strategies and practical implications can be found that can be used as a basis for designing marketing approaches that are more targeted and sustainable in this dynamic digital era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach which aims to understand and describe the phenomenon of Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) and its impact on purchasing decisions based on published literature. The study method used is a systematic literature review, namely by searching, evaluating and synthesizing various relevant scientific sources such as indexed journals, research articles and academic books. The review process is carried out in a structured manner to ensure that the sources used are credible, relevant and support the research focus. The selected literature comes from the time period 2015 to 2025, to ensure that the data and ideas studied are up-to-date and relevant to current technological developments and consumer behavior.

In the data analysis process, researchers used a thematic analysis or meta-synthesis approach, namely by identifying the main themes that emerged from the results of previous research. The selected literature is categorized based on the Word of Mouth Marketing strategy used, the results achieved in the study, and its impact on consumer purchasing decisions. This categorization helps in understanding consistent patterns as well as differences that emerge in the findings of various studies. The results of the analysis are then compiled into a systematic description that provides a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of WOMM in influencing consumer behavior (Earley, M.A. 2014; Snyder, H. 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Key Findings of the WOMM Strategy

The Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) strategy is one of the marketing approaches most widely discussed in the literature, especially in the context of digitalization and changes in consumer behavior (Huyen, 2022). Based on the literature review, the dominant WOMM strategy involves

creating positive and memorable consumer experiences, thereby encouraging them to voluntarily share stories or recommendations with others. Many studies emphasize the importance of building product and service quality as the main foundation in triggering WOM organically.

One of the most widely identified strategies is the use of shareable content. This content can take the form of customer stories, video testimonials, or emotional and visually engaging campaigns. The main goal is to encourage consumers to share information voluntarily because the content contains entertainment, educational or inspirational value. This strategy is effective because it does not feel like advertising, but rather an authentic narrative from consumers themselves (Soetiyani & Hosea, 2023).

Apart from that, loyalty and referral programs are also WOMM strategies that are often raised in the literature. These programs encourage consumers to recommend products to others in exchange for certain rewards, such as discounts, reward points, or free products. Even though it is an incentive, this strategy is considered effective because it creates additional motivation for consumers to share their experiences, without reducing the trust value of the recommendations provided (Zhang, 2022).

Social media plays a very important role in developing WOMM strategies. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and Twitter allow information to spread quickly and widely. Increasing digital literacy also makes it easier for consumers to access and share opinions about a product. WOMM strategies on social media often involve the use of hashtags, challenges, and user-generated content that can create a viral effect (Liu & Dai, 2023).

Online communities, both general and specific (niche), also become effective media in WOMM. Many brands build user or customer communities that allow discussion, sharing tips, and product testimonials to occur naturally. This strategy creates an environment that supports brand trust and loyalty. Active and engaged communities are often the primary places where WOM develops organically without direct intervention from companies (Li, 2022).

The role of consumer reviews is also a major concern in WOMM strategies discussed in much literature. Reviews, whether in the form of ratings, comments or video reviews, greatly influence the perceptions of potential buyers. Many studies show that consumers tend to consider negative and positive reviews before making a purchasing decision (Zhao, 2024). Therefore, encouraging satisfied consumers to leave reviews is an important part of WOMM's strategy.

Apart from organic strategies, several studies also discuss the role of influencer marketing as a structured form of WOMM. Influencers, especially those who are closely connected to a brand's target market, are able to significantly influence the opinions of their followers. Although it is not always pure WOM due to paid collaboration, much literature categorizes this as a form of engineered WOM because it still relies on elements of trust and social relations (Sulistiawati et al., 2022).

Overall, the literature shows that the most effective WOMM strategies are those that are able to create a combination of message authenticity, trust between consumers, and dissemination media that are relevant to target market behavior. This strategy does not only rely on one-way communication from the company to consumers, but rather opens up space for consumers to become an active part of the marketing process. Therefore, WOMM is not only a communication tool, but also part of the consumer experience itself.

The Impact of WOMM on Purchasing Decisions

Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) has a significant influence on the consumer purchasing decision making process. These impacts can be classified into three main categories, namely cognitive, affective and conative. These three categories represent the stages that consumers go through starting from understanding the product, forming an attitude, to being encouraged to take purchasing action (Dhewi & Kurnianto, 2023).

Cognitive impact includes the influence of WOMM on consumer knowledge and understanding of a product or brand. When consumers receive information from other people in the form of reviews, testimonials or recommendations, they get an initial idea of the quality, advantages and disadvantages of the product. This information helps consumers in the process of evaluating alternatives before making a purchasing decision, especially when they do not have direct experience with the product in question (Kasarda, 2024).

Meanwhile, the affective impact of WOMM can be seen in changes in consumers' attitudes, emotions or perceptions towards certain products or brands. Recommendations conveyed emotionally by other consumers are often able to arouse interest, trust, or even enthusiasm for the product (Kautsar & Indayani, 2024). Literature studies show that WOM content with a positive and personal nuance is better able to build consumers' emotional closeness to the brand, compared to formal promotions from the company.

Conative or behavioral impacts reflect consumers' real intentions and actions in making purchases. When WOMM succeeds in instilling positive perceptions cognitively and affectively, this will usually be followed by an increase in purchase intention. Consumers feel more confident and motivated to make purchases because of social validation from other people who have used the product (Bu, 2023). Some literature also emphasizes that WOMM not only encourages first purchases, but also increases customer retention and loyalty.

Differences in the impact of WOMM on purchasing decisions are also seen based on industry sector. In service industries such as tourism, restaurants, and healthcare, WOMM tends to have a greater impact because purchasing decisions rely heavily on subjective experience and trust (Weng, 2023). Meanwhile, in physical product industries such as electronics or fashion, WOMM remains influential but is often complementary to other promotions such as visual advertising or price promotions.

In addition, demographic factors such as age, gender, education and digital literacy level also influence the extent to which consumers respond to WOMM. Younger generations (millennials and Gen Z), for example, are more likely to be exposed to and influenced by digital-based WOMM (e-WOMM), especially through social media and online review platforms. In contrast, older consumers tend to trust recommendations more from their immediate environment such as family or co-workers (Jumarni et al., 2023).

The literature review also reveals that the impact of WOMM can differ depending on the level of consumer involvement with the product. For products with high involvement, consumers will usually look for WOM information more intensively as a form of justification or validation before purchasing. Meanwhile, for products with low involvement, WOMM tends to work more spontaneously, such as through direct experience or short comments from other users (Margiyanti, 2022).

Overall, WOMM is proven to have a multidimensional influence on consumer purchasing decisions. Its effectiveness is not only determined by the content of the message, but also by who conveys it, through what media, and in what context. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of audience characteristics and market context is crucial in designing a WOMM strategy that is able to provide optimal impact on the consumer decision-making process.

Critical Analysis and Implications

Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) is often considered one of the most effective marketing strategies, especially in building consumer trust. When compared to traditional marketing strategies such as television advertising or print promotions, WOMM has a major advantage in terms of credibility. Consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from fellow users than commercial messages (Gursoy et al., 2022). Additionally, WOMM has high viral potential at a relatively low cost, making it an efficient strategy in reaching a wide audience.

However, the effectiveness of WOMM also depends greatly on the context and how it is implemented. Some literature shows that WOMM is not always superior to other strategies such as paid digital marketing, especially in the context of new products or brands that do not yet have a customer base (Kamilah & Abadiyah, 2023). In these cases, WOMM often needs to be supported by more aggressive promotions to create initial awareness before the WOM effect can work optimally. Therefore, the WOMM strategy should not stand alone, but rather be part of an integrated marketing approach.

One of the main challenges in implementing WOMM is the difficulty in controlling the circulating narrative. In contrast to advertising which can be completely controlled by the company, WOMM is organic and depends on consumer opinion. If the consumer's experience is negative, the WOM formed will also have a negative impact on the brand image (Indriani & Yani, 2024). This requires companies to maintain consistent product and service quality, because every interaction with consumers has the potential to become WOM material.

Another challenge is measuring the effectiveness of WOMM quantitatively. Many companies still have difficulty assessing how much WOMM contributes to sales conversion or customer loyalty. Even though there are indicators such as the Net Promoter Score (NPS) or referral rate, this approach does not fully reflect the complexity and dynamics of WOM that occur in the real world, especially on social media which is changing very quickly (Septiya & Oetarjo, 2023).

Apart from that, the phenomenon of fake reviews or manipulation of public opinion is an ethical and strategic issue in the implementation of WOMM. Some companies use fake reviews or influencers who don't actually use the product, which could ultimately damage consumer trust if discovered. Therefore, authenticity is an important factor in maintaining the long-term

effectiveness of WOMM, and marketers must be careful in choosing an approach that does not mislead consumers (Wenas et al., 2024).

In terms of implications for marketers, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding the right audience and channels in spreading WOM. Not all WOMM strategies are suitable for all market segments; approaches that are successful among Gen Z may not be effective for more conservative segments (Saputra & Santosa, 2024). Therefore, marketers must be able to design strategies that suit the demographic characteristics and behavior of their consumers, as well as utilize digital technology wisely.

For businesses, WOMM offers a great opportunity to increase competitiveness through positive customer experiences. This strategy can become a competitive advantage if companies are able to create an ecosystem where customers feel valued and encouraged to share their stories (You & He, 2023). This includes investments in customer service, product quality, as well as community platforms or discussion forums that support interaction between customers.

Overall, WOMM is not just a promotional tool, but is a reflection of the consumer's experience with the brand. Therefore, the success of WOMM is closely related to a holistic customer relationship management strategy. To optimize the potential of WOMM, companies must focus on building long-term trust, not just creating momentary buzz. With an ethical, consistent and relevant approach, WOMM can become a sustainable strategy that has a real impact on business growth.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review, the Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) strategy is proven to have a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. The impact includes cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude) and conative (purchase intentions and actions) aspects. Strategies such as shareable content, consumer reviews, online communities, and utilization of social media are the dominant forms of WOMM in the literature. In addition, the effectiveness of WOMM is strongly influenced by the industry context, consumer demographic characteristics, and level of involvement with the product. Although WOMM has great potential, challenges such as narrative control, measuring effectiveness, and issues of content authenticity remain major concerns in its implementation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to enriching understanding of consumer behavior and the dynamics of marketing communications in the

digital era. Meanwhile, practically, the results of this study can be an important reference for marketers and business people in designing WOMM strategies that are more focused and relevant to market needs. With an ethical, consistent and customer experience-based approach, WOMM can be a sustainable marketing strategy and have a real impact on brand growth and consumer loyalty.

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