

Celebrity Endorsement and Purchase Intention: Mediating Role of E-Wom

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Abstract

This academic work investigates the relationships between celebrity endorsement, electronic word-of-mouth, and purchase intention using the Elaboration Likelihood Model paradigm. Utilizing structural equation modelling with AMOS on a dataset of 328 respondents from Biratnagar, Nepal, the results indicate that celebrity endorsement negatively affects purchase intention, implying that poorly aligned endorsements may discourage purchase intentions. However, celebrity endorsement positively influences EWoM, underscoring its potential to spark consumer discussions and engagement online. EWoM substantially increases purchase intention, emphasising its vital influence on consumer decision-making. The mediating influence of electronic word-of-mouth in the relationship between celebrity endorsement and purchase intention illustrates how outside information from celebrity endorsements can evolve into the primary mode of processing via online interactions. The study contributes to the Elaboration Likelihood Model by integrating celebrity endorsement and EWoM into a cohesive model, emphasizing EWoM's dual role as both an outcome of peripheral

processing and a driver of cognitive engagement. Practical implications for marketers include aligning celebrity endorsements with brand identity and leveraging digital platforms to maximize EWoM's impact. Limitations include the cross-sectional design and cultural specificity of the sample. Future studies should investigate different settings, longitudinal designs, and the function of new technology in consumer behaviour.

Keywords

Celebrity endorsement, electronic word-of-mouth, purchase intention, SEM, Nepal

Introduction

Modern consumer-driven markets utilize endorsements as a powerful influence mechanism that combines marketing strategies with star power to sway buying choices. Consumer research shows that 70% of buyers say they prefer purchasing products when these products get endorsements from favourite celebrities (Cuomo et al., 2019). The 70% consumer survey data indicates celebrities play a dominant role in influencing global market purchasing habits. The phenomenon exists universally across different markets because it affects both fashion industries as well as technological sectors and beverages (Hackley & Hackley, 2017). Digital media's accelerated evolution introduced novel hurdles and transformational possibilities for how endorsements affect customer purchasing behaviours.

The modern digital transformation reshaped traditional customer behaviour patterns by altering both brand interactions and purchase decision behaviours (Hafez, 2023). The global spread

of e-commerce technology demands immediate action because online platforms now play a central role in buying decisions. The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a live demonstration of how the coronavirus transformed consumer patterns worldwide (Loxton et al., 2020). The closure of physical stores during lockdowns forced consumers to use online platforms more than ever before while digital media endorsements achieved unmatched influence. Consumer decision-making shifted away from traditional sources toward electronic word of mouth (EWoM) because people needed peer and influencer validation for their purchasing choices (Roy et al., 2024; Rani et al., 2022; Wang et al. (2012).

Studies show that Apple succeeds in boosting sales by partnering with celebrities such as Lady Gaga since this tactic improves brand image (Campanella 2019). Nike's strategy to work with athletes including Serena Williams stands as a universal example of successful tactics that modern marketing depends on (Sharifzadeh & Brison, 2024). The convergence of broad celebrity endorsement effects and viral electronic word of mouth creates extensive power to bring consumers into interaction and generate purchase intentions (King et al., 2014; Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022).

Nepal presents a unique context for this research due to its emerging digital economy and cultural nuances (Pokharel, 2023). With over 80% of the population under the age of 40, Nepal has witnessed rapid adoption of digital platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Urban areas such as Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Dharan have seen a surge in online shopping, driven by increased smartphone penetration and improved internet connectivity (Kharel et al., 2022). Celebrity endorsements are particularly impactful in Nepal, where admiration for public figures like Priyanka Karki and Anmol KC is deeply rooted in cultural values. These endorsements not only appeal to urban consumers but also resonate with semi-urban and rural populations, highlighting their aspirational nature. Moreover, E-WoM significantly influences purchase decisions in Nepal (Pudasaini & Dangol, 2024). Nepali society's collectivist philosophy highly values communal perspectives and peer endorsements. For instance, product endorsements by celebrities often spark discussions on social media platforms, amplifying their impact through peer validation. Nonetheless, the extent to which E-WoM mediates the connection between endorsements and purchase intention in Nepal is an unexamined domain, rendering this study especially pertinent.

This research also aligns with the government's Digital Nepal Framework, which aims to leverage digital technologies to boost economic growth. By understanding how digital marketing strategies such as celebrity endorsements and E-WoM influence consumer behaviour, businesses can align their practices with this national initiative. Additionally, the findings of this study hold practical implications for local businesses aiming to expand their reach through cost-effective digital marketing strategies. For example, small and medium enterprises can collaborate with micro-influencers to generate E-WoM, leveraging their relatability to target specific consumer segments effectively.

The mediating role of EWoM in celebrity endorsement studies has not received comprehensive examination (Eren-Erdoğan & Ergun, 2017). This existing research gap requires the present study to critically examine generalized research on consumer response patterns to endorsement campaigns. This study explores EWoM mechanisms which help explain how endorsements influence purchase intention. The research explores E-WoM as a mediator between celebrity endorsements and purchase intention through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) framework. The paper follows a structure starting with its theoretical foundation then describing hypothesis development followed by methodology followed by results after which the discussion section and conclusion provide the summary

Theoretical Framework

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is utilised in the present study. ELM posits that individuals process persuasive messages through either the central route, which involves careful and thoughtful consideration or the peripheral route, which relies on superficial cues such as endorsements (Ott et al., 2020). This theory is crucial for understanding how celebrity endorsements and E-WoM shape shopper buying intent. By leveraging the peripheral route, endorsements can influence attitudes without in-depth cognitive processing (Xiu et al., 2024). Celebrity endorsements support the peripheral route of ELM. For example, when a celebrity endorses a product, their perceived attractiveness, credibility, and likability act as cues that influence consumers' attitudes (Liu & Liu, 2019). EWoM adds depth to this process by engaging consumers in discussions that may activate the central route, reinforcing the message's persuasiveness (Teng et al., 2014). Finally, purchase intention represents the behavioural outcome influenced by central and peripheral processing (Liang & Lin, 2018).

Celebrity endorsements serve as an influential promotional tool by leveraging the believability and attractiveness of the endorser. Celebrity endorsements have positively influenced purchase intention, particularly for luxury brands (Nabil et al., 2022). For example, endorsements from widely admired figures like Cristiano Ronaldo or Taylor Swift create an aspirational appeal. Several factors contribute to this effect, including celebrity credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness (AlFarraj et al., 2021). The relationship between the celebrity and the product is also important, although its significance may vary (Afifah, 2022). Celebrity endorsements can improve product awareness, trustworthiness, and consumer belief, crucial in purchasing decisions. The agreement between the celebrity's persona and the product enhances consumer perceptions and stimulates purchasing intention. Moreover, they can create positive attitudes towards endorsed brands and products, stimulating purchase intention (Adam & Hussain, 2017). The meaning transferred by the celebrity to the product has been recognized as a resilient predictor of purchase intent. Built on the above scrutiny, the subsequent hypothesis is developed.

H1: Celebrity endorsements positively influence purchase intention.

Celebrity endorsements often generate buzz and discussions among consumers (Wang et al., 2013). Celebrity endorsements and electronic word-of-mouth (EWoM) have positively influenced buyer behaviour. Research shows that celebrity attractiveness and trustworthiness positively affect consumers' online sports product purchases (Akoğlu & Oğuz Özbek, 2024). For instance, when a celebrity shares their experience with a product on social media, it triggers conversations and reviews that spread quickly across platforms. Emotional brand posts by celebrities on social media platforms like Instagram have a stronger impact on offline and online WOM than rational posts (Ahmadi et al., 2023). Celebrity EWoM influences purchase intentions through perceived value and enjoyment, with weak-tie EWoM moderating this relationship (Nofal et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the efficacy of celebrity endorsements may depend on the endorsement style. Implicit endorsements (e.g., "I love it") are generally more persuasive than explicit endorsements (e.g., "I recommend it"), as the latter triggers stronger persuasion knowledge in consumers (Liao et al., 2023). These discussions increase the visibility of the endorsement, amplifying its reach and impact through E-WoM. In light of the above debate, a further hypothesis is provided.

H2: Celebrity endorsements positively influence E-WoM.

Consumers increasingly rely on peer recommendations and reviews when purchasing (Dinulescu & Prybutok, 2022). Electronic word-of-mouth (EWoM) has completely influenced buying intent across various contexts. Studies have found that EWoM adoption significantly impacts consumers' purchase intentions for online shopping (Sardar et al., 2021) and beauty

products on TikTok (Yones & Muthaiyah, 2023). Platforms like Yelp or Amazon reviews illustrate how positive E-WoM can directly boost sales, as consumers perceive these opinions as unbiased and trustworthy. The influence of EWoM extends to branded apparel, where it positively affects brand equity and purchase intention (Khan et al., 2023). Though, the effectiveness of different EWoM sources may vary. While influencer reviews positively impacted purchase intention, customer reviews did not significantly influence one study (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). These findings underscore the significance of electronic word-of-mouth in influencing consumer behaviour and offer valuable insights for marketers in developing effective digital promotional strategies. Following the preceding discussion, the subsequent hypothesis is presented.

H3: E-WoM positively influences purchase intention.

E-WoM bridges the initial impact of a celebrity endorsement and the consumer's decision to purchase (Bu et al., 2021). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) considerably impacts consumer performance and purchase intentions. Positive eWOM on social media platforms like Facebook positively affects brand attitude and purchase intention for consumer electronics (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Participation in debates and evaluations stimulated by endorsements enhances consumers' propensity to develop favourable attitudes and intentions towards the product, so complete the persuasive process initiated by the celebrity. The number of Twitter followers and eWOM valence interact to impact source credibility, product involvement, and buying intention (Jin & Phua, 2014). Different eWOM sources, including strong-tie, weak-tie, and celebrity endorsements, affect purchase intentions through perceived value and enjoyment (Nofal et al., 2022). A meta-analysis reveals that eWOM positively correlates with sales, with its effectiveness varying across platforms, products, and metrics. For instance, eWOM on social media is more effective when receivers can assess similarity to senders, and eWOM volume has a stronger impact on sales than valence (Babić Rosario et al., 2016). The following hypothesis is put forth about the debate above.

H4: E-WoM mediates the relationship between celebrity endorsements and purchase intention.

Methods

Methods should be described with sufficient details to allow others to replicate and build on the published results. Please note that the publication of your manuscript implies that you must make all materials, data, computer code, and protocols associated with the publication available to readers. Please disclose at the submission stage any restrictions on the availability of materials or information. New methods and protocols should be described in detail while well-established methods can be briefly described and appropriately cited.

Research manuscripts reporting large datasets that are deposited in a publicly available database should specify where the data have been deposited and provide the relevant accession numbers. If the accession numbers have not yet been obtained at the time of submission, please state that they will be provided during review. They must be provided prior to publication.

Interventionary studies involving animals or humans, and other studies that require ethical approval, must list the authority that provided approval and the corresponding ethical approval code.

Results and Discussion

The study utilised an exploratory methodology. A self-administered questionnaire survey

was used to collect cross-sectional data from 328 individuals in Biratnagar, Nepal. The data were gathered via the online survey platform using a purposive sampling method from the population of the Biratnagar region in Nepal. The questionnaire was accurately disseminated among the area's population via online platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter. The form comprised closed-ended questions organised into two distinct sections. The initial section consisted of questions designed to collect information on demographic attributes, such as gender, age, education, and household income. The second segment comprised observations regarding the three latent variables under examination. Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modelling using Amos 21, following the two-step process established by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The preliminary stage of the investigation encompasses the measuring model, which includes exploratory factor analysis (EFA), item-to-item correlation, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. The last segment is the structural assessment, which assesses goodness to fit. The measurement scale for celebrity endorsement, E-WoM and purchase intention was adapted and modified from Wang et al. (2013), Cheung (2014) and Toldos-Romero, & Orozco-Gómez (2015), respectively.

The demographic profile of the participants shows a diverse representation across several variables. As for gender, the sample comprised predominantly males (69.2%), with females accounting for 30.8%. Age distribution displayed that the maximum participants were between 18–25 years (33.2%), followed by 36–45 years (27.7%), 26–35 years (25.3%), and 46 years and above (13.7%). Regarding educational completion, the principal cluster held a master's degree (30.7%), with graduate degrees (28.3%), undergraduate degrees (24.3%), high school or below (6.1%), and master's degree or higher (10.6%) comprising the rest. Monthly income levels were led by those earning \$1,001–\$2,000 (34.1%), followed by individuals earning above \$3,000 (26.2%), \$2,000–\$3,000 (21.3%), \$500–\$1,000 (16.2%), and less than \$500 (2.1%). Finally, most participants were single (73.5%), while the remainder were married (26.5%). This demographic distribution delivers critical knowledge into the composition of the sample and its potential repercussions for the study.

Table 1: Demographic samples

Demographic variable	Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	227	69.2
	Female	101	30.8
Age Group	18–25 years	109	33.2
	26–35 years	83	25.3
	36–45 years	91	27.7
	46 years and above	45	13.7
Educational Level	High School or below	20	6.1
	Undergraduate degree	80	24.3
	Graduate degree	93	28.3
	Master degree	101	30.7

	Master's degree or higher	34	10.6
	Less than \$500	7	2.1
	\$500-\$1,000	53	16.2
Monthly Income	\$1,001-\$2,000	112	34.1
	\$2,000-\$3000	70	21.3
	Above \$3,000	86	26.2
	Single	241	73.5
Marital Status	Married	87	26.5

Measurement Model

The two stages used to evaluate the study's data are the measurement and structural models. The responses' reliability was evaluated by applying Cronbach's alpha. Data reliability for customer ethnocentrism, pro-environmental attitude, and green purchasing intention is indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.764, 0.872, and 0.913, respectively. Fornell and Larcker (1981) stipulate three specific requirements for establishing convergent validity: (a) factor loading must exceed 0.50, (b) composite reliability must surpass 0, and (c) the average variance extracted must be more than 0.50. All factor loadings in Table 2 exceed 0.50, with values from 0.643 to 0.954. All values exceeding 0 fall within the interval of 0.829 to 0.969 for composite reliability. Each construct's average extracted variance falls between 0.593 and 0.885, all of which are greater than 0.50, indicating the constructs' reliability. Discriminant validity is assessed by comparing the correlation between variables to the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). When the average variance extracted (AVE) for every multi-item construct crosses the common variance among the constructs, discriminant validity is validated, as Table 3 shows.

Table 2. Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Item Code	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	CR	AVE
Celebrity endorsement	CE1	0.643	0.764	0.829	0.593
	CE2	0.663			
	CE3	0.776			
	CE4	0.730			
	CE5	0.694			
Electronic word-of-mouth	E1	0.909	0.872	0.918	0.740
	E2	0.879			
	E3	0.942			
	E4	0.689			
Purchase intention	PI1	0.954	0.913	0.969	0.885
	PI2	0.933			
	PI3	0.949			
	PI4	0.927			

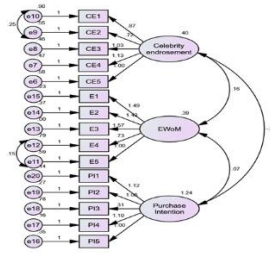


Figure1: Confirmatory factor analysis model.

Table 3: Discriminant validity

Construct	EWoM	CE	PI
EWoM	0.787		
CE	0.415	0.622	
PI	0.100	0.115	0.846

Structural Model

Several substantial fit indices showed that the structural model tailored the data satisfactorily. The Goodness to fit was indicated by the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), which was 0.919 and above the necessary cutoff of 0.90. The appropriateness of the model was confirmed by the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), which was 0.959 and above the acceptable cutoff of 0.90. The model and the observed data fit each other to a satisfactory degree, as indicated by the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.071. With a CMIN/df ratio of 2.631, which was within the recommended range of 1 to 3, the sample size and model complexity were appropriately balanced. Strong evidence that the structural model is appropriate for analysing the relationship about celebrity endorsement is provided by the aggregated fit indices.

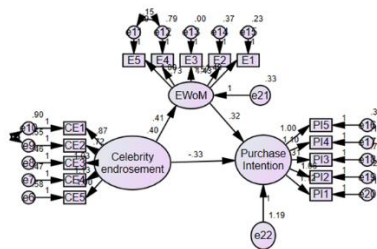


Figure 2: Structural model result

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing results indicate a significant relationship among the latent variables. Hypothesis 1 (H1) demonstrates a negative relationship between CE and PI, with a beta value of -0.333, supported by a highly significant p-value of 0.000. Hypothesis 2 (H2) shows a positive and significant relationship between CE and EWoM, with a beta value of 0.412 and a p-value of 0.010. Hypothesis 3 (H3) confirms the positive influence of EWoM on PI, a beta value of 0.317 and a p-

value of 0.005. Finally, Hypothesis 4 (H4) validates the mediating role of EWoM in the relationship between CE and PI, with an indirect effect beta value of 0.140 and a highly significant p-value of 0.000. The findings emphasize the interplay between CE, EWoM, and PI, revealing both direct and mediated effects.

Table 4: Hypothesis summary

Hypothesis	Relation	Beta Value	P- value	Remarks
H1	CE->PI	-0.333	***	Accepted
H2	CE->EWoM	0.412	0.010	Accepted
H3	EWoM->PI	0.317	0.005	Accepted
H4	CE->EWoM->PI	0.140	***	Accepted

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on consumer behaviour by examining the interplay between celebrity endorsement (CE), electronic word-of-mouth (EWoM), and purchase intention (PI) through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The negative relationship between celebrity endorsement (CE) and PI (H1) suggests that certain celebrity endorsements may inadvertently lower purchase intentions due to a mismatch between the celebrity's image and the product or consumer expectations, leading to peripheral route processing that diminishes persuasion. Conversely, the positive relationship between CE and EWoM (H2) underscores the role of celebrity endorsements in stimulating online discussions and word-of-mouth among consumers, suggesting that endorsements can act as a trigger for central route processing when consumers engage in detailed discussions. Furthermore, the positive association between EWoM and PI (H3) confirms the critical role of digital platforms in shaping consumer decisions, aligning with ELM's proposition that well-structured and credible information enhances persuasion through the central route. Lastly, the mediating role of EWoM in the relationship between CE and PI (H4) highlights how online interactions amplify or moderate the effects of celebrity endorsements on purchase behaviours. This mediation reinforces the dynamic interplay between peripheral cues provided by endorsements and the deeper cognitive evaluations fostered by EWoM.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions by leveraging the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to explain the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in the digital era. First, it bridges a gap in the literature by integrating celebrity endorsements and electronic word of mouth (EWoM) into a single framework, offering a comprehensive understanding of how endorsements influence consumer behaviour through dual processing routes central and peripheral. Second, the significant mediating role of EWoM adds depth to ELM by demonstrating how online interactions facilitate central route processing, transforming peripheral cues from endorsements into persuasive messages that ultimately influence purchase intentions. Third, this study enriches the discourse on EWoM by highlighting its dual role as both an outcome of peripheral processing and a driver of central route persuasion, providing a nuanced framework for future research. Moreover, it contextualizes ELM in the digital landscape, showcasing how celebrity endorsements, when

amplified by EWoM, can transcend traditional boundaries of influence by engaging consumers in a continuous cycle of cognitive elaboration. Doing so, it not only broadens the theoretical applicability of ELM but also provides marketers with actionable insights to design more effective digital campaigns. This integration of theoretical and practical perspectives lays the groundwork for exploring evolving consumer dynamics in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

Practical Implications

The findings offer practical insights for marketers and advertisers aiming to enhance the efficacy of celebrity endorsements in the digital era. Ensuring a robust alignment between the celebrity's image and the marketed product should be a paramount concern for firms employing celebrity endorsements. Improving peripheral route processing, which relies on rapid heuristic evaluations of a celebrity's credibility and attractiveness, necessitates this alignment. Consumer suspicion or dissonance resulting from misalignment may adversely impact their purchasing inclinations. Additionally, the role of electronic word of mouth (EWoM) as a critical mediator highlights the importance of encouraging consumer discussions on digital platforms. Marketers should design campaigns that not only feature compelling endorsements but also actively engage consumers, prompting them to share opinions, reviews, and experiences online. This engagement transforms peripheral cues into central route evaluations by encouraging deeper cognitive processing, which is more likely to result in sustained persuasion and stronger purchase intentions. Campaigns should be crafted to integrate traditional celebrity-driven approaches with robust digital strategies that foster credible and engaging online interactions. For instance, creating interactive content, hosting virtual events with celebrities, or utilizing user-generated content campaigns can drive meaningful consumer engagement and amplify the endorsement's impact. Social proof, in the form of positive EWoM, reinforces the credibility of the endorsement and helps build trust among potential consumers.

Understanding the dual role of EWoM—as both an outcome of peripheral processing and a driver of central route persuasion—empowers marketers to design holistic strategies. These strategies should appeal to consumer preferences, utilize the persuasive power of celebrity endorsements, and enhance their impact through digital amplification. By leveraging these insights, marketers can create campaigns that not only capture consumer attention but also sustain interest, fostering stronger connections between the brand, the endorser, and the target audience.

Conclusion

This study highlights the multifaceted links among celebrity endorsements, electronic word of mouth (EWoM), and purchase intention (PI) within the context of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). It emphasises the dual function of electronic word-of-mouth (EWoM) as both a catalyst for purchase intents and a consequence of endorsements. When meticulously aligned with a company's identity, celebrity endorsements can serve as useful supplementary signals that attract customers and enhance brand perception. However, the true impact of such endorsements often depends on how effectively they transition from peripheral cues to central route processing, where deeper cognitive engagement occurs. This transition is facilitated by EWoM, which acts as a bridge, transforming initial impressions into meaningful evaluations through consumer discussions and shared experiences. The findings underscore the importance of aligning marketing strategies with evolving consumer expectations, particularly in the digital era where online interactions significantly shape consumer behavior. By leveraging the power of digital communication,

businesses can foster deeper cognitive engagement, encouraging consumers to not only process marketing messages but also share their opinions, reviews, and experiences. This amplification through EWoM not only reinforces the credibility of celebrity endorsements but also establishes trust, which is critical for driving purchase intentions.

Incorporating these factors into a unified marketing plan enables organisations to adeptly manoeuvre across the intricate and evolving terrain of customer behaviour. By acknowledging the function of EWoM as a result of effective endorsements and a driver of consumer decision-making, marketers can create captivating and convincing campaigns. These insights offer practical guidance for businesses seeking to improve the efficacy of their marketing strategies, ensuring alignment with the target audience, cultivating significant connections, and ultimately increasing purchase intentions in a competitive and digitally oriented marketplace.

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