

Article

Understanding the Effects of eWOM Antecedents on Online Purchase Intention in China

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Abstract: Drawing on social identity theory, this study aims to examine the impact of antecedents of eWOM on the online purchase intention (OPI) of fashion-related products. In addition, social media usage moderates the relationship between eWOM and OPI. A structured questionnaire was completed by a sample of 477 Chinese WeChat users. An online survey was conducted in two metropolitan cities (Beijing and Shanghai). The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) generated by AMOS 22. The findings of this study found that all five antecedents of eWOM, such as fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, tie strength, and informational influence, positively related to the OPI of fashion products in China. Furthermore, eWOM significantly mediates the relationship between fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, informational influence, and OPI. The current study is considered the first to examine the role of eWOM in stimulating OPI through social media usage for fashion-oriented products in China. As such, it enriches the online buying literature by exploring the OPI mechanism through eWOM antecedents and validating the importance of social media factors in the development of online buying intention compared to previous studies. Furthermore, it provides several theoretical and practical implications, along with future opportunities.

Keywords: fashion involvement; sense of belonging; informational influence; electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM); social media; online purchase intention



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1. Introduction

Social media has rapidly become one of the world's leading platforms for distributing information between marketers and consumers worldwide [1,2]. With the fast development of social networking sites, smartphone acceptance, internet speed, and wireless network coverage, social media users can now interact with their friends and accelerate the exchange and retrieval of information via their mobile phones and tablets [3,4]. According to the statistical data reported by the end of December 2018, nearly 98% of people in China have access to the Internet via smartphones and other social networking sites; out of those, 48% of people purchase online fashion products [5]. Many online fashion retailers use the power of social media to sell and promote their products [6]. Githii, S. et al. revealed fashion products as the most popularly purchased goods online [7]. This fact encourages researchers to examine different fashion products via online shopping because it is a novel phenomenon for many consumers. The rapid development of social media has changed how information is collected and provided to consumers with an online social domain to discuss and share information on fashion products and services, specifically by electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) [8,9].

eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company that is made available to a multitude

of people and institutions via the Internet" [10]. eWOM communications effectively reduce the possibility of uncertainty and risk while making a purchase decision and thus stimulate consumer purchase intentions [9,11]. Lien, C. et al. noted that online information significantly affects customers' intention to make purchases [12]. Lien, Cao and Zhou established the vital relationship between online information and the right consumers' purchase intention [13]. Motta, J. and Barbosa, M. pointed out that 84% of consumers view the most reliable eWOM reviews and recommendations, and 68% trust online reviews; moreover, generally consumer confidence in online promotion and advertising has developed [8]. By posting products' information on SNSs, the consumers can share content and comments, which creates eWOM and gives the preferred inter-peer confidence [14].

Marketing managers have also recognized the worth of social media marketing and eWOM. Social media is essential among Chinese consumers in spreading the products and service experiences. In the context of eWOM, consumers like to read comments and feedback from other users of experience. These comments have an impact on the decision to purchase fashion products between consumers. Therefore, it is necessary to know the important factor that may have a high impact on eWOM and the purchase intention of fashion-related products on SNSs. Previously, several studies described in the perspective of eWOM have focused less on factors shaping eWOM on consumers' behavior and attitude [15,16]. Duggan, M. et al. also argued that most of the research conducted on eWOM focused on restaurant experiences, movie discussions, and the tourism sector [17]. Therefore, with the aid of empirical data, the current study aims to recognize the factors influencing eWOM about fashion products in SNSs. The identified factors are fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, tie strength, and informational influence. It also attempts to recognize the possible outcome of eWOM on the online purchase intention of fashion products.

According to the foregoing discussion, the precise goals of the research are as follows: (1) to examine the influence of eWOM intentions on the online purchase intention of fashion related-products in SNSs, (2) to explore the factors affecting the eWOM intention of fashion products in SNSs, and (3) to examine the moderating role of social media usage among the online purchase intention of fashion-related products and eWOM intentions in social sites. Practically, the results of the present research will have valuable implications for the fashion industries in China, which include social media as their marketing strategy.

The paper is prepared as follows. First, we review the literature, research model, and relevant hypothesis. Next, we explain the methodology part, measurement item, data analysis, and results. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and managerial implications and recommend potential zones for future study.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Online Purchase Intention

Purchase intention can be defined as the customer's online purchase intention, a product, or service based on their biased judgment with their overall assessments [18]. Herr, P. et al. noted that purchase intention should be the psychological barometer of consumers buying the products to fulfill their necessary needs and predict their consuming behaviors [19]. Online purchasing has undoubtedly become an integral, useful, and attractive activity on social media platforms [20,21]. Nowadays, social media has enormously changed the style of the consumers' purchase decisions. Several people examine other consumers' experience and suggestions posted on social media before purchasing new fashion items [22].

The ease of approach to information online has led to the spread of the online purchasing phenomenon. Based on the above discussion, consumers' purchase intention is judged as a kind of consumer's psychological expression in the practice of consumption, which may represent the realistic possibility of consumers selecting and buying an actual product. In light of the theory of social identity, this intent depends on the consumer's

positive attitude toward acting in that manner. In this study, users of WeChat receive a positive eWOM because their online purchase intention will be progressive. Therefore, the current study discusses online purchase intention as a dependent variable.

2.2. Social Identity Theory

Suggested by [23] in social identity theory, consumers define their experience and identity as a sense of belonging to the posts in their close friends' lists. Tajfel, H [23] found social identity as the personal knowledge that one belongs to various media groups together with a string of emotional and valuable impacts out of the species where they belong. From the social identity theory perspective, WeChat friends' circles offer consumers a space to identify with a particular media group because they fulfill their required need to define themselves. When self-concepts of WeChat users have intersecting sections with features of friends' circle lists, they improve their high identification with the group and intensify their sense of belonging, which in turn affect WeChat commitment [11,24].

China is regarded as a collectivistic environment that highlights the sense of belonging and group membership [11]. However, recent WeChat fame may raise Chinese consumers' trust and thus share fashion product experience. Specifically, the present study endeavors to develop social identity theory by considering major consumers' factors. While fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, tie strength, and informational influence serve as factors of eWOM intention, this research claims that trust is simultaneously an individual element that will affect Chinese consumer's initiative. In other words, these factors are an essential trait of SNSs consumers, such as an online purchase intention.

Applying social identity theory, users who surf in moments with greater identification are more likely to have a stronger level of online purchasing experience and involvement on the WeChat platform than others. When social identification is inserted in friends' circles, eWOM and group influence show their importance to discuss these social rings. By contrast, WeChat offers a complete platform for consumers to improve their social identity. Alternately, it ensures them the possession of meaningful opportunities to enhance themselves. A model is presented that euphemistically and theoretically reflects the links among fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, tie strength, informational influence, social media, and online purchase intention to comprehend the fundamental factors of eWOM intention among Chinese SNS users.

3. Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

Information technologies have delivered numerous kinds of media for consumers to share a view about new products. This website includes SNSs, online communication media, and blogs. The model considers fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, tie strength, informational influence, eWOM, online purchase intention, and social media usage. Please see Figure 1 for the conceptual model.

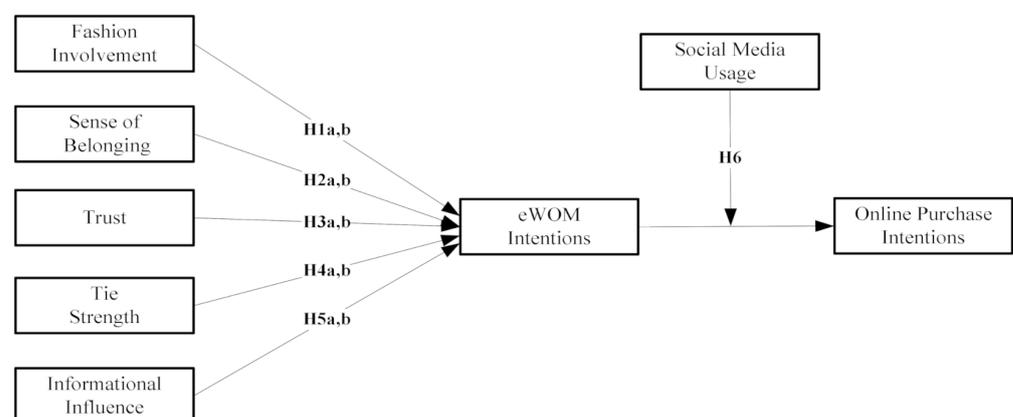


Figure 1. The conceptual model.

3.1. Fashion Involvement

Fashion means anything which is modern and the latest. Involvement with a product is essential because it has been established to be the variable that is highly predictive of purchase intention. The latter is based on the fashion involvement level to which consumers view fashion products as an essential part of their lives [25]. As the fashion-connected products are multifaceted in the assessment and personal image is linked to it, the fashionable user frequently uses media to gain opinions about new products through their friends [26]. Consumers are deeply involved in receiving fashion information for themselves and others [27]. These products are high-volume products, and social identity theory also explains, “the higher the degree of involvement, the stronger beliefs consumers will form” [28]. Modern products are identified as the strong-involvement products that consumers focus on to pursue information from the various platforms before making purchase decisions because it links to the expensive price and involves the group and the personal identity of the consumers. High-involvement products have been perceived to pursue consumers’ further involvement on SNSs and online groups [29]. Moldovan, S. et al. asserts that high-fashion involvement plays a significant role in committing to fashion-related eWOM [30]. Thus,

Hypothesis 1a (H1a). *Fashion involvement positively influences eWOM in SNSs.*

Hypothesis 1b (H1b). *The relationship between fashion involvement and online purchase intention in SNSs is mediated by eWOM.*

3.2. Sense of Belonging

The sense of belonging refers to identifying individuals with a community who feel that they are members of the system [31]. Zhao, L. et al. noted that a sense of belonging reveals the individual’s emotional connection to the online community or environment [32]. When a sense of belonging and mutual aims exist, an individual will give importance to other community members and attempt to offer something valuable for them [33]. For instance, customers with adequate experience are eager to recommend a product value to encourage purchase among their friends. By contrast, consumers with inadequate experience are likely to ask their peers for help in making the appropriate purchase decision [34]. When a strong commitment exists in a group, then individuals are thought to attempt their best to help others in the system by answering their inquiries [35]. Online group members are proposed to participate in knowledge sharing when they see high community involvement [36,37]. When individuals have a strong emotional commitment to the community and feel emotionally attached to the group, they will be encouraged to engage in the community on an ongoing basis [33]. As a result, the present study suggests that the higher the sense of belonging seen by individuals, the greater the chances that they will aim to join the online purchasing. Hence,

Hypothesis 2a (H2a). *Sense of belonging positively influences eWOM in SNSs.*

Hypothesis 2b (H2b). *The relationship between a sense of belonging and online purchase intention in SNSs is mediated by eWOM.*

3.3. Trust

Trust has been identified as a necessary factor in developing associations among consumers and a certain product and is acknowledged as a central variable of a long-standing association with customers [38]. Morgan, R. M. and Hunt, S. D. described trust as “... widely accepted, and this definition shows the importance of confidence, integrity, and reliability in conceptualizing trust” [39]. Previous scholars have established that trust has a strong influence on intention to follow company advice, intention to purchase online, information seeking, social media intention, and the acceptance of recommendation

agents [40,41]. Trust might be personal, organizational, or intra-organizational [42,43]. This article focuses on the trust between WeChat users and discovering whether WeChat users trust the suggestions shared by other users about the products and services. Consumers' trust in the online platform can reduce their anxiety and uncertainty and encourage the online purchase of fashion products.

In a social exchange context, the role of trust has been an important subject of the researcher. Trust pertains to a positive belief about the dependability and reliability of a consumer or an object [44]. The more a consumer trusts a website, the lower the chances of online transaction risk, and the more the intention to purchase on the website. Trust has been identified as a massive influence on both the use of SNSs and the desire to engage in eWOM [42], reflecting an essential role of trust in SNSs. As such, we recommend the following Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a). *Trust positively influences eWOM in SNSs.*

Hypothesis 3b (H3b). *The relationship between trust and online purchase intention in SNSs is mediated by eWOM.*

3.4. Tie Strength

Tie strength raises the influence or an amount of relation among fellows of a social network [45]. Granovetter, M. found that tie strength might be strong and weak. A strong tie is found among family, relatives, buddies, and people you trust [46]. They are all close and healthy relationships and the source of emotional and substantive support to the individual [47]. Nonetheless, weak ties also perform as a broad platform of communication and information for the searching of view on the SNSs [48]. Brown, J. J. and Reingen, P. H. established that at the macro-level (e.g., communication flows through the group), weak ties revealed an important connecting function, allowing contacts to share and disseminate among the different online groups [49]. On the micro-level (e.g., flows within small or dyads group), strong ties were usually likely to be motivated for the movement of recommendation behavior.

With freely unique network opportunities in SNSs, the selection of products can be randomly influenced by imparting stable "strong-tie" interaction or slightly related "weak tie" (e.g., ordinary connections). By contrast, a strong tie exerts a major influence at the personal and medium group level; social network characteristics allow the weak tie to develop their potential influence by extending consumer's network to that of other online consumers. This advanced eWOM communication happens throughout a large-scale network. Consequently, strong and weak ties are established by SNSs to motivate consumers and discuss product-related information, thus encouraging eWOM intention. As such:

Hypothesis 4a (H4a). *Tie strength positively influences eWOM in SNSs.*

Hypothesis 4b (H4b). *The relationship between tie strength and online purchase intention in SNSs is mediated by WOM.*

3.5. Informational Influence

The informational influence of a social website matters because consumers are considered trustworthy sources as they seek information before making an online purchase decision. Informational influence reveals the trend to accept other consumer information and consider substantial information accurate [50]. Information social influence plays a key role when a consumer faces a time limitation, lacks knowledge, recognizes a high risk in the transaction, or cannot make online purchase decisions alone [51]. Bearden, W. O. et al. found two styles of information: normative, and informative influence [52]. Normative influence can fulfill the expectation of others' beliefs, attitudes, and norms. In contrast, informative influence maintains the ability to receive information from others, particularly

well-informed users, to purchase products [53]. Informational influence tends to generate accurate information and the correct purchase choice and thus indicates trustworthiness. Social identity theory focuses on social reliance and highlights the influence of informative and normative on the message's reliability and persuasiveness. In SNSs, informational influence drives valuable contribution and eWOM attitudes in an encouraging way. Chu, S. C. and Kim, J. established that eWOM and purchase intention are positively influenced by informational types and are considered the best advertising source for modern Chinese industries [1]. As such, we propose:

Hypothesis 5a (H5a). Informational influence positively influences eWOM in SNSs.

Hypothesis 5b (H5b). *The relationship between informational influence and online purchase intention in SNSs is mediated by eWOM.*

3.6. Moderating Role of Social Media Usage

Web 2.0, generally known as social media, has a rich and different ecology that fluctuates in scope and purpose. According to Kim, Park, Lee and Parkto, social media platform judgment illustrates the varied social media situations and how similar platforms currently fascinate different demographics [54]. Social media usage provides consumers with unbiased, complete, and resourceful purchasing information [55], and it is measured as an essential information source for consumers and the online community [56]. In the Chinese context, consumers hold an uncertain information opinion from companies' promotion and news channels. Accordingly, consumers place excellent value on eWOM opinions from close contacts, family, and key opinion leaders from electronic media. Therefore, marketers target and segment customers more efficiently within these platforms, including the understanding of customers' attitudes [4,57]. Organizations and individuals have adopted social media usage [58], and have altered the discussion's nature, facilitating trades to connect with customers and build intense and increased sales [1,59]. In these networks, the online system influences the consumers and can influence the behavior of other consumers [30]. Social media affects the customers' minds to purchase and significantly influences online shopping behavior; they display a fast mode for processing and collecting information [60]. The current study presents the idea that social media is a helpful platform where fashion organizations specifically develop awareness, attention, and determination in the purchasing context. Most online purchasers in China use social media to find information about products, and consumers' purchase intention is influenced by social media [54,61]. Thus, we propose that

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *Social media usage moderates the relationship between eWOM and online purchase intention.*

4. Methodology

4.1. Sample and Data Collection

The data were collected under the context of WeChat, the popular social networking software in China. An online survey was conducted in two metropolitan cities (Beijing and Shanghai). A survey link was created on <http://www.wjx.cn>, (accessed on 2 January 2021) as well as a QR code of the link between Chinese social media applications such as WeChat. We chose WeChat for data collection due to its several features. First, WeChat has many members, with over 900 M members in 2018 [62]. Second, WeChat has a social recommender system named "Gouwuquan" where WeChat members can share their experiences of online shopping with pictures and words, and others are able to comment and browse the profiles of the recommendation contributors where the information of their recommendations, browsing activities, other members' comments and likes for them are included. Third, a hyperlink exists in each recommended product, which links to the relevant online shop. Exploring "Gouwuquan" on WeChat helps us understand how

social recommendations influence customer behaviors. Additionally, the questionnaire was printed in English first and then translated into Chinese by a Chinese native. One post-graduate and one Chinese doctoral student majoring in English Literature were invited to carry out back-translation, as it vastly reduces translation errors. We conducted a pilot study with 47 students. They had WeChat online buying experience before starting the final survey to check the survey questionnaire's accuracy. The participants clearly understood all measurement items in this study.

The data were collected from March 2020 to May 2020. A total of 548 answers were received from the participants. Seventy-one responses were discarded due to inexperience in shopping and ignorance to queries. The final sample size of 477 was further investigated to authenticate this study's latent variables based on the gender share of 263 (55.1%) males and 214 (44.8%) females. The majority of the respondents reported an age range of 18–40. Based on education, the population was vastly educated; 9% of respondents had an intermediate level study. The majority of the respondents (60%) noted that they frequently used WeChat. Only 20% of respondents were found to have less than a year of shopping experience through WeChat. Besides, 55% often share eWOM about their shopping experience on WeChat, and 3% did not share anything to WeChat about it (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics of research sample ($n = 477$).

Measure	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	263	55.13
	Female	214	44.86
AGE	18–25	209	43.81
	26–30	115	24.10
	31–40	89	18.65
	Over 40	64	13.41
	Intermediate/High School	47	9.85
Education Level	Bachelors	193	40.46
	Masters	110	23.06
	Doctoral/PhD	69	14.46
	Others	58	12.15
	Frequency of using WeChat	Many times a day	287
Several times a day		157	32.91
Once a day		33	6.91
Online Shopping Experience through WeChat.	>1 Years	97	20.33
	1–2 Years	196	41.09
	3–4 Years	117	24.52
	<4 Years	67	14.04
eWOM posting experience on social Media sites (WeChat)	Never	15	3.14
	Few (1–2 times)	47	9.85
	Frequently (2–3 times)	148	31.02
	Often (more than 3 times)	267	55.97

4.2. Instrument Development

Data were collected using a structured online survey that contained questions designed to measure the following variables: fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, tie strength, information influence, eWOM, online purchase intention, and social media. All

current variables have been taken from recently developed scales and have been modified marginally in their wording to satisfy the needs of this paper.

The first phase involved three questions. First, we asked the audience whether they were WeChat users or not. For those who replied no, the survey was concluded at that point, and we excluded them from the study. The second question asked the audience if they were WeChat users to pursue any kind of shopping information. As the present study aimed to test consumer opinion on purchases via social networks those who responded negatively were excluded from the next question. Members who continued to the next questions have qualified that they are WeChat operators and usually use WeChat to pursue purchase information. Third, we asked the audience whether they contribute to any public WeChat account. In the case of the yes or no answer to these questions, the audience continued answering the questionnaire.

All measurement scale items of the constructs were adopted from the recent research and explained in the current study. For fashion involvement, six items were adopted from Tigert et al., [63]; for sense of belonging, three items were adapted from Zhao et al., [32]; for trust, three items were adapted from Kim et al., [64]; for tie strength, four items were adapted from Gilbert and Karahalios, [65]; for informational influence, three items were adopted from Bearden et al., [52]; for eWOM intention, three items were adapted from Shih et al., [66]; for online purchase intention, four items were adapted from Jalilvand and Samiei [67]; and for social media usage, four items were adopted from Rapp et al., [68]. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

4.3. Result

The research model used for data analysis was Amos 22. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was adopted to analyse the complexity of the variables, and then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to reduce the measurement items by identifying the latent variables. Additionally, internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) was applied to measure the reliability and validity of the constructs. The structural equation modeling (SEM) method was used to verify the measurement model.

CFA was applied to classify latent variables to measure the research model, its Hypothesis, and its validity. Some items were removed for better representation of data that increases fitness via EFA and CFA. Additionally, the factor structure of the EFA was eliminated in order to improve overall model fitness by applying CFA. All CFA values have met the threshold value, which shows the positive picture (CMIN $\chi^2 = 480.50$, $p < 0.05$, $df = 2.43$, $p < 0.005$, GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.90, NFI = 0.97, RMSEA valued 0.07 and RMR 0.07).

4.4. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

To evaluate the measurement model, we conducted a convergent and discriminatory validation test on the basis of the following criteria: (1) internal consistency reliability and composite reliability (CR) higher than 0.70, and (2) average variance extraction (AVE) greater than 0.5 [69]. Table 2 indicates that all reliability values meet the threshold value. CR ranged from 0.791 to 0.921. All values of the AVE are above the threshold value [70].

The heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlations was used to check the validity of the discrimination; [71] recommended this technique as a substitute for assessing discriminatory validity and ensuring that the HTMT is efficient instead of the traditional process (i.e., cross-loading and the Fornell–Larcker standard). The HTMT value must be under 0.85, showing that discriminant validity is recognized among two reflective factors [72]. Each value is below 0.85, indicating the correct discriminatory validity (Table 3).

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity.

Key Variables	Items	Means	SD	Item Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's	KMO
Fashion involvement	6	4.101	1.32	0.82–0.93	0.921	0.626	0.729	0.79
Sense of belonging	3	3.220	1.37	0.79–0.91	0.890	0.620	0.878	0.81
Trust	3	3.542	1.21	0.86–0.94	0.791	0.612	0.988	0.79
Tie strength	4	3.213	1.12	0.77–0.89	0.881	0.717	0.705	0.69
Informational influence	3	4.011	1.42	0.82–0.93	0.858	0.693	0.912	0.82
eWOM intention	3	3.212	1.71	0.86–0.95	0.896	0.710	0.878	0.66
Purchase intention	4	4.544	1.45	0.82–0.94	0.813	0.703	0.808	0.84
Social media	4	3.331	1.31	0.81–0.95	0.898	0.706	0.856	0.71

Table 3. Discriminant validity (heterotrait–monotrait method).

Key Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(1) Fashion involvement (FI)	–							
(2) Sense of belonging (SB)	0.245	–						
(3) Trust (TT)	0.212	0.331	–					
(4) Tie strength (TS)	0.185	0.112	0.211	–				
(5) Informational influence (II)	0.322	0.476	0.432	0.414	–			
(6) Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)	0.412	0.329	0.587	0.345	0.424	–		
(7) Purchase intention (PI)	0.409	0.552	0.434	0.55	0.342	0.434	–	
(8) Social media (SM)	0.511	0.576	0.441	0.597	0.551	0.478	0.448	–

5. Results of Proposed Hypothesis

Fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, and informational influence (the individual coefficients are 0.73, 0.43, 0.37, and 0.63, respectively) are established as significant and positive interpreters of eWOM. H1a, H2a, H3a, and H5a are therefore supported. By contrast, tie strength (the coefficient 0.03) influences eWOM is insignificant. H4a is not supported. The outcomes of constructs are indicated as essential facets of eWOM. In Table 4, For H6, SEM was applied to evaluate the moderating effects of social media on purchase intention. The result confirms that social media is a noteworthy moderator, with a coefficient of 1.32 and a significant *p*-value. Thus, H6 is supported (Table 4).

Table 4. Model structural SEM direct and indirect (moderation).

H	Relationship	Estimates	SE	CR
H1a	Fashion involvement → eWOM	0.73	0.159	2.311 ***
H2a	Sense of Belonging → eWOM	0.43	0.209	2.442 ***
H3a	Trust → eWOM	0.37	0.185	2.167 **
H4a	Tie Strength → eWOM	0.03	0.193	1.878 ***
H5a	Informational Influence → eWOM	0.63	0.175	2.434 **
Moderating Effect				
H6	eWOM * social Media → purchase intention	1.32	0.341	3.765 ***

Notes: SE = standard error; CR = critical ratio. *** *p*-value < 0.001, ** *p*-value < 0.005.

To test the mediating roles of eWOM, we used a contemporary method recommended by [73] applied in place of [74]. The bootstrapping method was used with a bias-corrected confidence assessment applying the macro process [75]. Therefore, the upper and lower limit confidence intervals (ULCI and LLCI) were gained for the indirect effect of fashion involvement (LLCI 0.192 and ULCI 0.294) on purchase intention, sense of belonging (LLCI 0.186 and ULCI 0.263) on purchase intention, trust (LLCI 0.193 and ULCI 0.432) on purchase intention, and informational influence (LLCI 0.193 and ULCI 0.432) on purchase intention do not measure zero. In the method of a bootstrapped confidence interval, media-

tion is shown by the exclusion of zero from the confidence interval for the unstandardized indirect effect. After all, the lower and upper limit confidence intervals do not carry zero among them. The indirect effect is strongly diverse from zero at $p < 0.05$, which shows the mediation. Hence, we established that the mediation influence is statistically significant (Table 5).

Table 5. Mediator analysis.

Dependent Variable	Effect of IV on M (a)		Effect of M on DV (b)		Total Effect of IV on DV (c)		Direct Effect of IV on DV(c')		Bootstrap Result for Indirect Effect (ab)		Result
	β	t	B	t	β	t	β	t	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	
FI-eWOM-PI	0.42 **	12.87	0.68 **	12.07	0.46 *	19.34	0.27 **	9.29	0.192	0.294	Supported
SB-eWOM-PI	0.28 **	8.36	0.39 **	10.78	0.52 **	12.56	0.39 *	11.83	0.186	0.263	Supported
TR-eWOM-PI	0.17 **	11.65	0.11 **	8.32	0.54 **	27.65	0.42 **	5.65	0.193	0.432	Supported
II-eWOM-PI	0.18 **	11.64	0.12 **	8.56	0.55 **	18.12	0.40 **	10.12	0.194	0.455	Supported

Note: IV: independent variable; DV, dependent variable; M, mediator; FI; fashion involvement, SB; sense of belonging; TR, trust; II; informational influence: ** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$.

6. Discussion

This study aimed to discover the essential elements of eWOM, which can also influence fashion products' online shopping in the social WeChat app. Our findings suggest factors that encourage consumers to engage in eWOM marketing. These factors are fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, tie strength, an informational influence that develops eWOM, and purchase intention of modern products through WeChat.

Fashion is anything which is modern and the latest. Fashion is changing every day, and fashion-conscious people want to adopt a modern lifestyle. Accordingly, people use SNSs to determine the right information about everyday items. The study confirms that if a consumer is highly fashionable, they will join the fashion-connected eWOM. The eWOM involvement forces consumers to exhibit the argued products' online purchase intention [76]. Fashion industries pose multiple kinds of SNSs to consumers for information and enhance online purchase intention [77]. Our result supports that the high-fashion consumers have the online purchase intention of the argued products, and eWOM mediates amongst fashion involvement and online purchase. Our social network study shows that sense of belonging is another important variable that positively influences eWOM. The marketing literature highlights sense of belonging as an essential component in shaping a consumer's behavior [78]. In SNS membership, consumers predict a greater sense of belonging and display a high intention to participate in eWOM. When individuals perceive themselves as online community members, they treat others like family members and attempt to help other community members. Moreover, when customers experience good interaction with their online social community, they perceive that the information is accurate and trustworthy [79].

Based on SNSs in China, trust plays a strong positive association with the intention to follow eWOM. Trust reveals the reliability of the information supplier: if the origin of the information is durable and real in diverse platforms, then the level of information provider develops as trustworthy in the mind of the reader [80]. High trust in the SNS increases consumers' opportunity to engage themselves in eWOM and attempt to share and seek suggestions about the brand [78]. Findings show that trust is additionally important when attempting to use fashion products. Consumers with a strong concern for fashion follow information from other consumers who have trust. The result of this study is similar to several past studies [81].

As expected, tie strength positively influences eWOM intention to give and take product information in the SNSs, such as WeChat. Importantly, results display that tie strength does not positively impact consumers to share information in WeChat. One reason can be that when sharing information on WeChat, consumers focus on sharing feedback with all the contact circles, which include an extra digit of associates (i.e., weak ties);

consequently, they only exchange the data with their buddies (i.e., strong ties). Another justification could be that on WeChat, consumers can merely post information without thinking wisely. Hence, tie strength in SNSs has no decisive influence when users share product information with others.

Informational influence conforms when the individual requires information from other people to choose the right products before purchasing. The informational influence exists when one person wants information for selecting efficient products [82]. Social identity theory describes the informative and normative variables that affect the reliability and persuasiveness of the information. The finding of the present research shapes the service provider's informational influence to support the production of the purchase intention for fashion brands. If someone realizes that he/she does not have accurate data, which is needed to create the right decision before purchasing, then he/she will search for the information from others who they think have the right information. Informational influences are expressively connected with the eWOM on SNS and consumer online purchase intention.

A study proves that social media usage significantly moderates the relationship between eWOM and the online purchase intention of fashion products. Motta, J. and Barbosa, M. showed that eWOM behavior on social media, particularly the time they spent daily on WeChat, established high importance. Social media is a high information channel in which consumers obtain updated information about fashion-related products from friends and markets [8].

7. Theoretical Implication

This study also provides relevant theoretical implications. Past research concentrated on the antecedents, objectives, and influence of eWOM. The current study adds to this knowledge by increasing the understanding of eWOM in terms of WeChat. It contributes to the present eWOM literature, both empirically and conceptually. It mainly focuses on how fashion-related information differentially influences the brand on SNSs. Subsequently, SNSs are incredibly effective in determining the potential influence of eWOM on consumers' online purchase intentions. The information about fashion products via WeChat is considered a convenient platform for Chinese consumers to motivate other consumers to share fashion-related information. Thus, Chinese consumers trust online information more than firm-generated information.

This study followed the theory provided by the literature on social identity theory. This theory helped determine the factors that play a central role to online purchase intention and eWOM in Chinese WeChat social media. It found the significance of all factors instead of tie strength. This study's outcome primarily contributes to the literature of fashion involvement, sense of belonging, trust, tie strength, information influence, eWOM, social media, and online purchase intention in the context of Chinese WeChat social media. Past studies identified that this factor is an important element of eWOM and the online purchase intention of fashion products in the Chinese background [83]. The theoretical structure established in this study approves the notion of the critical factor, and the theory can provide several implications to managers in connecting the command of eWOM intention for their commercial improvement.

8. Managerial Implications

This research provides several valuable managerial implications for the Chinese online fashion industry. First, this research recommends that an online information source from WeChat plays a useful role for consumers to buy fashion products. We indicate that consumers are likely to access the WeChat app with high fashion involvement when seeking fashion product information. Therefore, the online manager should consider others' ratings, trial experience, and valuation of their fashion products by placing a hyperlink on their webpage that offers an approach to eWOM information [84]. WeChat and other social apps are important for managers, owing to their high involvement and prominent

influence. Furthermore, the WeChat organizer should add a feature that enables consumers to use WeChat continuously with enthusiasm and ease. This particular finding is beneficial for fashion organizations to create the strategy and include other consumers in the eWOM campaign, which eventually influences purchase intention.

Company officials seek the best avenue to upgrade their marketing plan, principally in fashion products in which extraordinary chances of uncertainty and change exist. WeChat offers them such an approachability platform to reach large numbers of consumers in terms of rapid feedback. This study's outcomes can support vendors to develop the prospective of eWOM to their reasonable concern by considering the factors inducing eWOM and online purchase intention. Furthermore, to build user intention, marketers must pay attention to the significant mediating role of eWOM. Rather than share conservative promotion strategies, fashion firms should establish the eWOM channel's significance on SNSs and include it in their complete marketing plans.

To target customers with fewer SNS users, online managers can offer gifts or incentives to motivate them to establish an additional relationship with their brands. This strategy increases customers' involvement with the products and raises their attention to the offerings delivered on the SNSs, such as WeChat [84].

9. Limitations and Avenues for Future Developments

The limitations of the current research may offer suggestions for future studies. First, this study concentrated on fashion and modern products that provide a useful framework for WeChat consumers. The model and results cannot be directly applicable to other formats such as cosmetics and may need additional analysis and modifications in the framework. Second, the current study only considers WeChat as an SNSs to generate eWOM. However, consumers may display different behaviors toward eWOM on other SNSs, such as Renren and Weibo. Third, this study's results may not be a general finding in China because the location survey was conducted only in Shanghai and Beijing. China is a large country with an economic position and local customs. Thus, we recommend performing a similar study in this same domain but in other regions in China. Finally, a future study could improve our research framework by including other factors or using the present one within different contexts.

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