

## **The Role of Electronic Word of Mouth in Shaping Purchase Intentions: Insights from the Sri Lankan Skincare Industry**

**W M S A Fonseka**

Department of Marketing Management, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka  
*aroshafonseka1212@gmail.com*

**B S S U Bandara**

Department of Marketing Management, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka  
*saumya.uditha@kln.ac.lk*

This study examines the impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on purchase intention in the Sri Lankan skincare industry, emphasizing the mediating role of brand credibility. E-WOM, a rapidly expanding form of digital communication, has become a key determinant of consumer behavior, particularly in industries where trust and authenticity are critical, such as skincare. This research investigates the core dimensions of E-WOM—credibility, quality, and intensity—and their influence on consumer decision-making processes. Addressing a significant gap in the literature, the study explores the interplay between E-WOM and brand credibility within an emerging market characterized by distinct cultural and economic factors.

A quantitative research approach was adopted, utilizing structured questionnaires distributed to 380 respondents in Sri Lanka's Western Province. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess and validate the relationships between E-WOM, brand credibility, and purchase intention. Findings reveal that E-WOM significantly influences purchase intention, with brand credibility playing a crucial mediating role. High-quality, frequently shared, and credible E-WOM enhances brand credibility, fostering consumer trust and increasing the likelihood of purchase. The study highlights that Sri Lankan consumers place greater trust in peer-generated content over traditional advertising, which is often perceived as less reliable.

Additionally, the study underscores the evolving digital landscape in Sri Lanka, where consumers prioritize peer recommendations and shared experiences over brand-driven narratives. This shift makes E-WOM a powerful tool for marketers seeking to enhance consumer engagement and brand loyalty. The results emphasize the potential of E-WOM-driven

strategies to build strong consumer-brand relationships in a market increasingly transitioning to digital-first communication models.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges several limitations. The focus on the skincare industry and a single geographic region (Western Province, Sri Lanka) may limit the generalizability of findings to other industries and regions. Furthermore, external factors such as economic fluctuations, regulatory changes, and competitive market dynamics were not considered, which could influence the observed relationships. Additionally, the reliance on quantitative methods may restrict in-depth consumer insights that could have been obtained through qualitative exploration. Future research could broaden the scope by incorporating other industries, geographical regions, and mixed-method approaches to deepen the understanding of E-WOM's impact across diverse consumer segments.

The study makes important theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it reinforces the role of brand credibility as a mediating factor between E-WOM and purchase intention, extending existing literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior within an emerging market context. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for marketers, highlighting the importance of fostering credible, high-quality E-WOM through strategic digital engagement and consumer feedback management. Marketers are encouraged to cultivate online environments that facilitate authentic peer interactions, ensuring that consumer trust is consistently reinforced.

This study also sets the stage for future research on platform-specific E-WOM dynamics, demographic variations, and longitudinal trends. A deeper understanding of how E-WOM shapes consumer behavior will help marketers refine their digital marketing strategies, enhancing brand-consumer relationships and sustainable business growth in the skincare industry and beyond.

**Keywords:** *E-WOM, Brand Credibility, Purchase Intention, Skincare Industry, Sri Lanka*